

## REPORT TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

1.	<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Health and Wellbeing Board</b>
2.	<b>Date:</b>	<b>29<sup>th</sup> February, 2011</b>
3.	<b>Title:</b>	<b>Use of 084 Telephone Numbers in Rotherham General Practices</b>
4.	<b>Programme Area:</b>	<b>NHS General Practice</b>

### 5. Summary

In December 2009 the Secretary of State issued the "Directions to NHS bodies concerning the cost of telephone calls 2009". These directions mandated that regardless of the telephone number being called people should not pay more to call an NHS body than they would to make an equivalent call to a local telephone number. The directions did not expressly disallow the use of any particular telephone number ranges. This Direction came into force for all NHS bodies in December 2010 and were put into GP GMS and PMS contractual regulation in April 2010 with a 12 month implementation period April 2011.

A recent review of Rotherham General Practice telephone numbers was carried out and it identified that many were using 0845 and 0844 telephone numbers. Calls to these numbers from a fixed line are charged at no more than a call to local number. However all calls irrespective of the caller's provider or call plan should be at the local rate and as such the continued use of 084 telephone numbers by General Practices disadvantages some patients who cannot afford land lines and should be withdrawn.

Arrangements for the management of GP contracts are expected to transfer to the NHS Commissioning Board with the passage of the Health and Social Care Bill. Transitional arrangements see these responsibilities sitting with the South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw Cluster.

### 6. Recommendations

**This is an important issue for the people of Rotherham in allowing them access to NHS Primary care. We recognise that this is not core Health and Wellbeing Board Business but would ask that South Yorkshire Cluster Board colleagues take up this issue with Rotherham General Practices to ensure compliance with the Regulations.**

## **7. Proposals and Details**

In December 2008, the Department of Health (DH), England, published a consultation on *The use of 084 telephone numbers in the NHS*. The DH published their response to the consultation on 14 September 2009, which concluded that the use of phone numbers that charge the public or patients a premium rate to contact the NHS were to be banned in England. However, 084 numbers could continue to be used if call charges were no more expensive than those of the equivalent local calls.

This response was put into policy in December 2009 when the Secretary of State issued the "Directions to NHS bodies concerning the cost of telephone calls 2009". This Direction required all NHS bodies to review their arrangements for telephone services by December 2010 and consider if people would pay more to call them than they would to a geographical number. A geographic number is one from a landline to a landline in the same STD code area.

### **The Initial Response in Rotherham**

In response to the Direction a review of all Rotherham General Practice telephone numbers was carried out during 2010 and it was identified that many were using 0845 and 0844 telephone numbers..

When the review was completed and all of the 0844 and 0845 numbers were compared against the BT call rate charge all of the Practices were using telephone numbers that charged at a comparable rate to calling a geographic number from a land line and that they were all in compliance with the Direction.

Many other PCTs assessing their Practices against this Direction reached a similar conclusion to NHS Rotherham with regard to the use of 0844/0845 numbers and the numbers were widely retained across England. Locally both NHS Sheffield and NHS Barnsley adopted the same position.

### **Further Information and its Implications**

Subsequent to the review and decision regarding the use of 084 numbers, further DH advice has identified that all calls irrespective of the caller's provider or call plan should be at the local rate.

Telephone service suppliers cannot give a guarantee that calls to 084 numbers are charged at a local rate because:

- *There is a proportion of the charge set by, and retained by, the callers telecoms provider.*
- *While a patients phone provider may choose to include calls to 0844/0845 numbers as part of a call package it was only BT who were obliged to do this for their land line customers.*

The initial position taken by NHS Rotherham allowing the use 084 telephone numbers was revised in 2012 requesting all practices to cease use of these numbers and comply with the regulations.

A revised position on the use of 084 telephone numbers has been adopted by other NHS bodies since their initial decision in 2010. Locally, NHS Sheffield has changed its position and they implemented a programme to try ensure compliance with the Directions during the summer of 2011.

Due to the way in which 0844/0845 numbers are charged, as described above, it is not possible for practices to retain using them if they are to achieve full compliance with the Direction.

## **8. Finance**

Marginal loss of income to Rotherham General Practices.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

GP's are independent contractors and the the BMA GP Committee has taken the view that it would not be reasonable to expect practices to terminate long term contracts prematurely. Where a contract ends they would expect GP practices to comply with the regulation. Where it is not possible to terminate a contract then the BMA advice was that practices must consider introducing a system which if a caller asked to be called back this was carried out at their (the practices) expense. This is in line with DH guidance.

Use of these systems frequently include the rental cost of telephone equipment and potentially practices may revert to systems with poorer call handling capability.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

**None**

## **11. Background Papers**

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Legislation/Directionfromthesecretaryofstate/DH\\_110480](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Legislation/Directionfromthesecretaryofstate/DH_110480)

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_110479.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_110479.pdf)

[http://www.bma.org.uk/images/084guidancejuly2011\\_tcm41-207983.pdf](http://www.bma.org.uk/images/084guidancejuly2011_tcm41-207983.pdf)

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