



# Surgery Line

NETWORK EUROPE GROUP

## St. Helens GPs decide to make improved patient access their priority

The Haydock Medical Centre is a suburban GPs' surgery located on the outskirts of St Helens, 10 miles east of Liverpool. The practice is situated in the old mining village of Haydock and comes under control of the St Helen's PCT. There are over 8,100 patients registered at the practice which has 5 doctors plus 1 registrar, employing 20 staff in total. The socio economic profile of the patient base is mixed, although there are some pockets of deprivation in the locality as it is an area of relatively high unemployment. There are also high levels of chronic illness amongst the patient base: the practice has a particularly high incidence of heart disease and respiratory disease - a legacy of the area's mining past.

In common with surgeries up and down the country, patients at the Haydock Medical Centre frequently experienced difficulties when trying to phone in to the practice. All too often, patients would hear the engaged signal and experience the frustration of having to ring back several times before getting through. This was a recurring problem with their previous phone system as it was simply unable to cope with the volume of calls coming into the surgery at peak times of day.



Haydock Medical Centre, St. Helens

Consequently, the partners and staff at the practice felt that something had to be done to make it easier for patients to call the surgery.

Although they were not actively looking for a new switchboard, when NEG approached them, they quickly decided that it was not a difficult decision to opt for Surgery Line as the range of useful facilities it offered would go a long way towards solving their communication problems. Janet Case, Practice Manager at the centre, explains that "Prior to the installation of Surgery Line, patients were constantly hearing the engaged tone which was



Pam Moran, Receptionist

obviously both annoying and time consuming for them. To make matters worse, people would ring in early to get their test results, thereby blocking the line for

patients who needed to make appointments or to speak to a doctor urgently.” Both Janet and the partners felt that the Surgery Line system had much to recommend it. “We liked the range of features that it was able to offer us such as the automated call handling facility coupled with the ability to give queue information. The system also has an efficient one step out of hours transfer system which we felt would be helpful for our patients.”

Following its installation in September 2004, the Surgery Line has considerably eased call congestion and the vast majority of patients have been satisfied by the improved service. “We are pleased with the installation and the support that we have received from NEG. The whole transfer process has been quite painless and the new system has more than lived up to our expectations,” adds Janet. “Patients like the option of choosing their call destination, and the response to the system has been mainly positive.”

But any form of change can meet with resistance, and there have been a few patients who have complained about the change in the number. The amount of complaints received has been minimal however - only 24 complaints out of a patient base of 8,150, representing less than 0.3% of the total patients. Janet believes that once patients become more familiar with Surgery Line, they will appreciate the benefits of speed and service that the new system has to offer.

Five months on from its installation, the staff at the Haydock Medical Centre are convinced that Surgery Line has made a substantial improvement to the service that they are now able to offer to their patients. The response from reception staff – usually the first in line when it comes to dealing with the public – has also particularly enthusiastic. “The Surgery Line system is

far easier to use than our previous system,” says one of the reception staff, Sheila Mason. Receptionist, Pam Moran comments, “Because the calls are separated out by the time they reach us, we are able to book appointments more quickly.” “It is also great to have a direct line,” adds Jayne Chadwick, Quality Manager. In fact, the direct lines installed at the practice are another reason that congestion on the switchboard has been relieved.



Appointment display board in the reception area

### Haydock Medical Centre's top five reasons for going ahead with Surgery Line:

1. Ease of call routing
2. The facility for out of hours divert
3. Specified phones with direct dial feature
4. The panic button to protect staff
5. Direct lines for staff

Despite the inevitable small numbers who have a resistance to change, Haydock Medical Centre is pleased with their new system and feel that it has many advantages for all those involved with the practice – staff and patients alike. “You may need to be prepared for some scepticism from your PCT,” concludes Janet Case, “but the Surgery Line service is a good system and it is worth arguing for. It has certainly been beneficial to both our staff and our patients. Other surgeries have contacted me to ask about the system and I have been happy to recommend it to them.”

### What is Surgery Line?

“Surgery Line is a cost-effective way for forward looking surgeries to improve the service that they offer to patients, reduce stress levels for staff and self-fund a state of the art phone system,” explains NEG's CEO, Richard Chapman. “As you can see, this case study focuses on one of the hundreds of surgeries that have already switched to Surgery Line. By doing so, they have saved money, improved the service that they offer patients and relieved the pressure on busy staff.”

### You and your staff benefit

When a surgery switches to an 084 number, NEG will install and maintain the most efficient communications system on the market. You specify exactly what equipment you want to receive (from handsets to switchboards) for no extra charge. With your own 084 number, you keep about 2p from every call to re-invest in your practice, instead of BT making all the profit from calls to your surgery.

### How your patients benefit

Patients benefit by having their calls answered more quickly. The engaged tone becomes rare – even at peak times – because you are able to handle incoming calls more efficiently whilst patient calls are spread out during the day. Calls to 084 or ‘lo-call’ numbers cost patients 4p per minute, the same as the first minute of BT's standard call rate between 6am and 6pm. This means that many patients will actually pay less in total because their call is answered and processed more quickly. Significantly, the cost of calls from mobiles remains unchanged - these account for around 30% of all calls to surgeries.

### The phone system that won't test your patients

“I've met a number of practice managers who think that Surgery Line sounds almost too good to be true,” says Chapman, “but after it's been installed, they realise that NEG delivers everything we promise, and more.”

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For more information on how the Surgery Line system can help you visit [www.negplc.com](http://www.negplc.com) or call

**0800 096 86 26**

