

New telephone number from Wednesday, 11th May

1. What does this mean for us?

The use of 084 numbers in the NHS is supported by the Department of Health, so long as patients do not pay more than the cost of a local call; decisions on whether to adopt an 084 number will continue to be freely taken by an individual GP surgery, dental practice or other NHS organisation.

For virtually all patients' calls, the local GPs' 084 number is not more expensive to call than using an ordinary number. More than 4.5 million patients use an 084 number to contact their GP surgery every month.

Patients pay local call rates with the 0844 number charges from landlines. If you use a mobile phone, depending on your provider and contract, such calls can cost more. Therefore, we encourage you to use a landline.

GPs do not make a single penny of individual profit from 084 numbers. NHS Direct also operates an 084 number.

Our new number from Wednesday, 11th May will be **08443 878911**

2. Why change?

Our present system is 8 years old and increasingly showing signs of old age and strain. Also, during a recent power interruption, when cables were accidentally cut due to road works, we lost our telephone lines as well. This brought home to us the necessity for updating our phone system.

Another important aspect is the volume of calls. Over a period of 12 months we reviewed our calls and this highlighted we regularly deal with over 7,000 each month; the level of demand continues to increase. Even more worrying for us was the fact that we answer less than 50% of our incoming calls, most of which are engaged – often by people trying to contact us at peak times and continually trying.

Therefore, we also needed to find a system which would enable us to capture all calls and direct them to specific desks, manned by our staff wherever possible, so we can answer calls more speedily. There are no guarantees, it is astounding how some days incoming call volumes can treble “normal” levels. There are no strong patterns.

3. What will the new system do the old system does not do?

As with most modern state-of-the-art systems, the new system provides many features which will help us to manage call demand and, at the same time, enable patients to obtain a better service. Here are a few of the features our new system offers us:

- i. Surgery Messaging Solution means no engaged tone for patients and calls answered immediately in order.
- ii. Direct phone numbers for specific members of staff.
- iii. Panic Buttons on any or all phones.
- iv. One touch call recording for staff safety or training purposes.
- v. Management and Call Handling stats giving inbound and outbound call traffic information.
- vi. Information on-hold recordings to help communicate other services to patients.
- vii. 24-hour cancellation line to reduce patients who do are unable to attend their appointment.

Every call will be answered and patients will be informed of their position in a queue, and given information relating to the practice as well as other options for communicating with us.

4. If we use a mobile in the main are there other options we can consider?

Indeed there are. Our relatively new web site contains details of all our services and helpful messages and links to other advisory sites. It is clear that many of our patients, young and old, are all beginning to use the website in greater numbers, especially to place their requests for repeat prescriptions.

Therefore, you should consider the use of email or use our web site to send messages for matters that can be dealt with. Our web site address is: <http://www.westpottergate.co.uk/> and our email is: mccarthy.roberts@nhs.net Don't forget you can also fax us on **08443 878912**

5. What happens on Wednesday, 11th May?

This is the day our old number is disconnected and you will need to use our new number – 08443 878911.

We are trying to publicise our new number in many ways, including on prescriptions and other notices. We have also issued a Spring 2011 Newsletter – pick up a copy if you do not have one. However, it is likely that some patients will not know. Therefore, if our old number is dialled on or after 11th May, you will receive a redirection message providing details of our new number.