

CONSULTATION PROPOSALS
General Practice Telephone Numbers

Section 2

General Questions

1. The Scottish Government's policy is that no person should be financially disadvantaged when contacting their GP practice.

Do you agree with this statement? Yes No

Please tell us a reason for your answer in the box below.

The Scottish Health Council (which is part of Healthcare Improvement Scotland) supports the view that patients should not be disadvantaged in any way in their contact with health services.

2. The Scottish Government considers that, given the above statement, no person should have to pay more than the standard cost of a local call when contacting their GP practice.

Do you agree with this statement? Yes No

Please tell us a reason for your answer in the box below.

Specific Proposals

Proposal 1

Calls made to GP practices who have a telephone number beginning 084 can be very expensive if called from a mobile phone as, unlike geographical numbers (those beginning 01 and 02), these are not included in many call plans.

Given this, would you support an outright ban on 084 numbers? Yes No

Please tell us a reason for your answer in the box below.

Given the increased use of mobile telephones and tendency in some cases for people to use them more than traditional landlines, the Scottish Health Council would support an outright ban on 084 numbers for contacting any health related organisation because of the cost involved.

Proposal 2

If a patient rings the GP Practice and the line is engaged or they are held in a queue, it can be frustrating and expensive for the patient. One option may be to have a "ring back" service, where the patient types in their phone number and once the line is available or they reach first in the queue they are called back by the practice.

Would you agree with the introduction of this service? Yes No

Please tell us a reason for your answer in the box below.

The Scottish Health Council supports this proposal providing:

- clear information is made available to patients about how the service will work in practice
- patients are made aware of a standard timescale of when they can expect to receive a call back from the practice
- monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure that patients are receiving timely call backs from the practice and not having to wait excessively.

Consideration also needs to be given to how this would work in instances where practices offer 'on the day' or emergency appointments where patients are asked to call first thing in the morning.

Proposal 3

One option may be to look into whether a call handling system could viably be introduced. This system, similar to that of the NHS 24 111 system, would see calls routed through a switchboard operator who would direct the call to the local practice.

Do you agree with this proposal? Yes No

Please tell us a reason for your answer in the box below.

The Scottish Health Council supports any approach that would result in quicker access to the local system and which resulted in greater efficiency, however, we feel that some patients could be anxious about telephoning a central point for what they regard to be their local service.

Also, this approach could prove off putting for some patients (for example, older people, people with learning difficulties, etc). Before this proposal is explored further, therefore, the Scottish Health Council recommends that consideration is given to a pilot exercise to test the system in practice and/or there is some targeted 'market research' to elicit views from patients and the public about how they would feel about the approach. The Scottish Health Council would be willing to offer some guidance and support on how best to elicit patient views on this.

Proposal 4

Each practice would obtain an 030 number, Ofcom introduced the 030 number range exclusively for public sector and not for profit bodies. 030 numbers offer the same extra functions as 084 numbers. All mobile operators have to charge 030 numbers in the same way as they would geographical numbers, ie included within a customer's bundle in their tariff. Although for the caller an 030 call is charged at the same as a local call, a charge is levied on the person or organisation receiving the call to cover the cost of the extra functions.

Would you agree with the introduction of these numbers? Yes No

Please tell us a reason for your answer in the box below.

Whilst the Scottish Health Council agrees that the introduction of 030 numbers for calling GP practices could be a way forward, it would be with the proviso that information is made available to patients and the public about the charging tariff (ie that it is charged at local rate) as part of an 'advertising campaign' prior to the system going live. Many people will not have used, or even come across, an 030 number before and so patients might be reluctant to use it until they are aware of the tariff.

Proposal 5

All GP practices would be required to use geographical numbers. There would be a grace period for each practice which had to change to enable current contracts to end without incurring unnecessary financial penalty to the practice

Do you agree with this proposal?

Yes No

Please tell us a reason for your answer in the box below.

This would be the Scottish Health Council's preferred approach as it removes all ambiguity about how calls will be charged as patients will readily recognise their local geographical telephone numbers and will know that they are charged at local rate.

Respondent Information Form**A CONSULTATION ON GENERAL PRACTITIONER
TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

Please Note this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately

1. Name/Organisation**Organisation Name**

Title Mr Ms Mrs Miss Dr **Please tick as appropriate**

Surname**Forename****2. Postal Address**

3. Permissions - I am responding as...

Individual / **Group/Organisation**

Please tick as

(a) Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site)?

Please tick as appropriate

✓ **Yes** **No**

(b) Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your responses available to the public on the following basis

Please tick ONE of the following boxes

Yes, make my response, name and address all available ✓

or

Yes, make my response available, but not my name and address

or

Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

(c) The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site).

Are you content for your **response** to be made available?

Please tick as appropriate

✓ **Yes** **No**

(d) We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Please tick as appropriate

✓ **Yes**