

Caroline Mockford

Dear Petitions Committee,

Many thanks for the action taking with regards to this petition and for sending on the responses from the various companies and organisations contacted.

The responses submitted have answered the query to a certain extent. However, there are still some issues that are quite unclear.

- According to the letter sent on the 9<sup>th</sup> April 2008 from Angela Atkins (ref: 2008/0009488OR) 'when calling from a landline the cost is split between the caller and NHS24' yet in the Scottish Government's response it is stated that this is not the case.
- There appears to be some confusion over whether the cost of NHS calls are on a 'revenue sharing basis' or not. Both Orange and O2 state that this is the case yet Scottish Government claims that this is not so and that NHS 24 does not make any profit from the cost of calls. So therefore it is unclear where the extra costs are occurring.  
With regards to this, what role does BT play in this transaction as all phone companies have stated that they have to pay them for a 'termination' service in order to connect calls from their network to BT. Overall where is the extra cost being occurred? Is it BT? Is it NHS 24? Or is it the mobile phone companies?
- It is a good initiative to have access to NHS 24 information on-line, however for many people living on low incomes they do not necessarily have access to a computer or internet. Therefore not everyone will be able to benefit from this.
- Scottish Government also states that NHS 24 is the access point for patients requiring non-emergency assistance in the out of hours period. However it is sometimes not possible to know whether it is an emergency situation unless you can speak to someone who can advise you whether this is the case. Therefore if you are not able to contact NHS24 due to high costs or no credit in your mobile, this will lead to more pressure on the emergency services.
- According to Orange, O2 and Ofcom, numbers to charities that are members of The Helpline Association are free of charge. Ofcom suggests that THA are in the process of looking to extend this to public sector help lines. Would the committee be able to ask THA at what stage they are at with this and whether NHS 24 calls would be included in this.

- It is encouraging to see that action has been taken to look into the possibility of providing a new 3 digit number for access to non-emergency health services and I really hope that the outcome will be that this service is introduced as a free service taking into consideration the needs of people who may be in need of it the most but who will not be able to access it particularly people living in poverty.
- It is also a very positive practice that NHS 24 will call people back if they don't have enough credit however it is often the case that people may have no credit to make the initial contact. It would be also interesting to find out whether this practice is well known amongst the general public.
- With regards to the text messaging service, it is encouraging to see that Scottish Government are positively committed to exploring the use of technologies such as this. Is there any indication of if and when this might be put into operation?
- It is also very positive that this service may come under the 'harmonised European numbers for services of social value range' and I await in anticipation for the outcome of this. It would be a great statement if something like this were to come from Scottish Government as well as from the EU because unfortunately if this initiative does not take place, the situation will remain the same for mobile phone users.

I look forward to hearing again from the committee and to see the outcomes discussed at the committee meeting scheduled for the 9<sup>th</sup> February.

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The Scottish  
Government

*Thurs 9th Feb.*

Ms Caroline Mockford  
Chairperson

[Redacted contact information]

*check and address*

*2nd June*

Our ref: 2008/0009488OR

9 April 2008

Dear Ms Mockford

Thank you for your e-mail of 27 February 2008 to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing about call charges to NHS 24. I work in the Scottish Government's Primary and Community Care Directorate and have been asked to reply.

When calling NHS 24 from a mobile phone, the cost of the call is dependent on the mobile network and the type of contract the user has with the network. However, when calling from a landline the cost is split between the caller and NHS 24. The rate at which the landline call is made again depends on the caller's provider and the package they are on. Please be assured that NHS 24 has a process in place where in the event that a call has ended due to lack of reception or if the caller is concerned that they have little or no credit on their mobile, then NHS 24 will call back.

*August/oc SEPT*

NHS 24 has checked their online enquires for October, November and December 2007 using your email address and the subject matter. Unfortunately they were unable to find any records that match this description.

Thank you for taking the time to make the Cabinet Secretary aware of your concerns.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

*A. Atkins*

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