



# Surgery Line

NETWORK EUROPE GROUP

## Carmel Medical Practice reports positive patient response to Surgery Line

Carmel Medical Practice is situated on the western outskirts of Darlington in the Mowden region of the town. Opened in 1989, the surgery is based in a purpose built building and serves over 9,500 patients from a wide range of social backgrounds. There are twenty five staff in total, consisting of seven GPs, three nurses, one HCA (Health Care Assistant) and fourteen administration staff.



Carmel Medical Practice opened in 1989

*“The rate of positive comments about the phone system has risen”*

The practice originally decided to look at alternatives to their outdated phone system as patients were repeatedly complaining of engaged phone lines – a common problem at surgeries up and down the country. In response to comments made in the annual patient survey about being unable to get through on the phone, the Practice Manager at that time, Glen Carroll, and the Partners met with Kath Simons of NEG. They were impressed with Surgery Line’s capabilities and the system was duly installed in June 2005.

Since that time, a new Practice Manager, Karen Crook, has taken up a position at Carmel and she reports that Surgery Line is still working well for them.

*“The support has been excellent”*

“It took a few months for some of the patients to get used to the new system,” explains Karen. “But I can honestly say that the complaints are now far less than in previous years. We carried out another patient survey three months after installation and, although there were



The practice serves 9,500 residents from a range of backgrounds

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still some comments about the phones, the overall percentage for getting through on the telephone had considerably increased. We will never please everyone, but the rate of positive comments about the phone system has risen and I feel we have had a good response to the changes.”

The system has helped staff handle calls more efficiently as well as reducing the engaged tone. Patients now find it much easier to contact the surgery and are able to get through to the appropriate person more quickly due to the menu of options. The use of direct lines has also proved helpful in enabling GPs to get through to the surgery without using the patient lines.

Karen reports that staff like using the system and feel it is a significant improvement on their previous phone service. “I find the system easy to use,” comments Lynn Young, Receptionist at Carmel. Another Receptionist, Sue Anning responds in a similar way and also has praise for the trainers who helped them become familiar with the system when it was first installed. “They were very good and were happy to come back and offer more training if and when required.”

In addition, NEG’s support staff are mentioned in glowing terms by Karen. “The support has been excellent: the support staff are always very helpful,” she reports. “We had an easy changeover and the response to any teething problems in our early days was first rate.”

So with the staff happy, and most of the patients happy, are there any outstanding issues for the practice? “We would like it to be easier to make alterations such as changing messages,” comments



**Patients have responded positively to the Surgery Line system**

Karen. “At present, we have to ring support and pay for any alterations made after the initial six months, but this is a minor issue which doesn’t detract from the quality of the phone system.”

### **Carmel Medical Practice’s top five reasons for going ahead with Surgery Line**

1. Patients can get through more quickly than before
2. The options enable patients to go direct to the correct person
3. Direct lines enable the GPs to avoid using patient lines
4. The automated booking system helps prevent unnecessary queuing
5. The support staff are very helpful

Karen reports that there has been considerable interest in the system from practices within the area and that she is often asked for her opinion by other practice managers. “I have had a few people asking for advice about Surgery Line. At the end of the day, it is an individual practice decision, however we certainly feel that it was the right move for us and our improved response in the patient survey bears this out.”

### **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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Case Study No. 44

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