



# Surgery Line

NETWORK EUROPE GROUP

## Surgery Line gives Wiltshire villagers efficient phone access to their GP

Pewsey Surgery is located in a small Wiltshire village and has a contract as the PMS provider with Kennet and North Wiltshire PCT. Whilst the area is popular with commuters due to efficient rail links into London, the practice itself is located within a very rural locality and serves an ageing population. The practice has a patient base of 6,700 drawn from Pewsey village and the surrounding areas.

*“The user guide has proved to be very useful for getting to grips with the basic functions of the Surgery Line system”*

So what made the practice consider changing its phone system and number in the first place? We had a lot of problems with patients getting the engaged tone when they were trying to phone into the surgery, so we decided to investigate the alternative options available to us,” explains Shirley Hatt, Practice Manager at Pewsey Surgery. “We met with Paul Hounsell of NEG who explained how the flexibility of the Surgery Line system could help us manage calls more efficiently. Whilst we did have some concerns about how the patients would



Pewsey is an attractive village situated in rural Wiltshire

respond to the use of a menu selection and recorded message, Paul gave us the confidence to go ahead.” With the agreement of the Partners and the Practice Manager in place, the new system was installed at the surgery in May 2005.

Changing a phone number is a major undertaking for any organisation, but Shirley reports that the transition was handled efficiently and with minimum disruption for the practice. “The installation process went very smoothly and the training has also been very good,”



Staff at the surgery have appreciated the facility of on tap telephone support

comments Shirley. “As the system is still relatively new, we have not yet maximised its flexibility and made use of all the

options available.” Whilst there have been a few teething problems with the queuing system, the patients are now usually able to get through on their first attempt, even during busy times when previously they would have repeatedly encountered an engaged tone.

Thankfully, Shirley’s concern about how the elderly patient base would respond to the changes has proven to be largely unfounded. “Whilst the changeover was a bit of a culture shock for some of our patients, most of them appreciate that the system is a considerable improvement on our previous telephone service, although they do sometimes have to wait in a queue, particularly at peak times. This is because we simply don’t have enough staff to take all the calls at our busiest times,” comments Shirley.

### ***“Calls are handled more efficiently which is a big plus for us”***

The support from NEG staff has been a strength throughout the transition and installation period: staff at the surgery have appreciated the facility of on tap telephone support from the helpline department. In future, Shirley hopes to make fuller use of the ability the system offers to run reports and monitor call handling and usage once it has fully bedded in. “At present, we are using the system to run reports to check on lost calls although we don’t have any historical data to make comparisons,” she explains. “The user guide has proved to be very useful for getting to grips with the basic functions of the Surgery Line system, although a more detailed manual for managers (something that NEG are currently producing) would be useful.”

Shirley reports that the reaction from personnel at the surgery has also been mainly positive. “The Reception staff like the use of hands free headsets which

make the whole process of call handling easier, although a little light on the side of the headset to show when it is busy would be a minor improvement,” suggests Shirley.



Almost 7,000 patients for Pewsey and surrounding area use the surgery

### **Pewsey Surgery’s top five reasons for going ahead with Surgery Line**

1. The fact that patients call the surgery and no longer hear the engaged tone
2. The use of ‘groups’
3. The facility to run reports on system usage
4. The opportunity to have a modern phone system without capital outlay
5. On-tap telephone support

Since implementing the system, the surgery has found the whole call handling process easier and more efficient. Despite the inevitable fact that some patients found the change difficult at first, the benefits of improved communication have made the process worthwhile.

Shirley concludes “our patients no longer hear the engaged tone, and calls are handled more efficiently which is a big plus for us and what we wanted the system to achieve.”

### **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. 34

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

**0800 096 86 26**

