

Hospitals On Call

Medical enquiries are some of the most personal calls we will make. So, as we move in to an 'open all hours' society, can Consultants and clinics look realistically at outsourcing incoming calls as a viable and even ethical option?



In the not so distant past most consumers accepted that normal business hours were 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. If you needed anything outside of those hours, well tough – wait until Monday. Whether it's a good or a bad thing, society's expectations have changed and we have evolved quickly from six to seven day a week opening and well in to twilight hours. Longer working hours, 24/7 access to the Internet and mobile communications have made us an on-call society with access to multiple choices of service providers at the touch of a button.

This poses a quandary for most businesses. We all have to close sometimes so is there really a need to employ out-of-hours receptionists just to take those occasional calls? Calls could be left to voicemail but statistics say that 70% of callers won't leave a message and are unlikely to call back.

The popularity of outsourced telephone answering has grown rapidly as the need for 'instant' communication has grown. The market is tough and businesses have realised that callers simply won't accept an unanswered call and worse still may assume the company they are calling has gone out of business. What has also changed is the type and size of businesses that are outsourcing incoming calls. Growing from tradesmen and lone workers, the outsourced telephone answering service is now proving an attractive option to much larger organisations – and more especially private medical groups.

The medical market has been a huge growth area for Cambridge-based telephone answering provider PA Answer, with private hospitals and consultants making up the fastest growing client group in the company's UK-wide portfolio. Jamie Grove, Managing Director of PA Answer explains:

“The medical sector is interesting,” says Jamie. “There has to be an exceptional amount of trust from hospitals and Consultants for them to entrust such highly confidential calls to us. For their clients, these calls are often about as personal as it gets and they need to be treated with extreme care and confidentiality. You could also argue though that no caller will want to leave those details on a voicemail and in an age where we can choose to be treated almost anywhere a missed call is lost business.”

PA Answer had worked with smaller private clinics and consultants for some time before being approached by one of the UK’s largest private hospital groups to cover overflow calls plus out of hours enquiries and Consultant’s lines. “We already had additional security procedures in place such as CRB checks for all our staff,” says Jamie. “We made sure we had all the relevant information and contacts for each department, and as far as the caller was concerned they had reached the secretary of the department or Consultant they needed to talk to. We cover busy periods, staff holidays and out of hours and it’s surprising how many calls do come in that we are able to deal with effectively.”

Indeed, during the first trial, a private hospital group saw a significant increase in enquiries and bookings for consultations and procedures. Over a four-month period PA Answer dealt with 700 calls, 250 of which were enquiries. 100 of those enquiries resulted in bookings for procedures and as Jamie explains, “When you consider that an average operation costs between £3000 and £10000, just one of those enquiries would pay for our service for a full year.” At this hospital’s request, PA Answer has now developed a bespoke outsourced virtual medical secretary package for them that covers telephone answering, appointment management, administration and general enquiries.

“The main factor here is that every caller is professionally, sensitively and confidentially taken care of,” says Jamie. “The original trial was a resounding success and by allocating our own trained dedicated staff members to each hospital and consultant we can provide a seamless service that isn’t dependent on working hours or staff absences. This particular hospital group has rolled our service out across the UK and I would say currently it is our biggest growth area.”

Contact PA Answer on 0800 822 3408, email mycalls@paanswer.com or visit www.paanswer.com

