

Dear Ms Gannon

I cannot make your automatic response system work so I am just sending you an email. It is not confidential you are free to quote any part of it. My name is Dr Graham Lister I was the lead author of the NHS Direct National Scoping Study in 1997/8 (it was sent to all PCTs in April 98). At the time we conducted focus groups and 500 telephone interviews to capture public response to the idea of NHS Direct - it was overwhelmingly in favour and people indicated they would be quite happy to pay a call charge. At the time we (the study steering group and the working team) assumed that there would be a memorable 3 digit number allocated to the service and we were surprised later to discover that the 0845 46 47 number had been applied. It just seemed a mistake as it is difficult to remember and did not reflect the public service nature of the service. We also strongly supported the idea that NHS Direct should provide a single point of entry to non emergency services (with links to the emergency services if needed) this was to include out of hours GP services, mental health, keep you well advice and later medical appointments management. The current situation in which there are many different numbers competing for public attention is another basic mistake that was made due to a failure to align out of hours and NHS Direct services in all areas. These elements were assumed to be included in the basic design of the system. I seem to remember at the time that there was some discussion of the three digit number and it was noted that 999 presents a problem since apparently many people found that mobile phones in pockets produce unintended calls to this number - so I am surprised that you would wish to choose 111 which is likely to pose similar problems - but I am sure you will have thought of this.

I attach a copy of the original report on this topic - (an htm version) in case it is not available to you.

I hope this helps

Regards

Graham Lister

Dr Graham Lister

Fellow of the Judge Business School Cambridge University

Visiting Professor in Health and Social Care London South Bank University