

Free health advice  
when you need it



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# Healthline news

## Technology brings new ways to deliver health care

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*The way health care is delivered is set to change dramatically over the next few years. Technology is helping New Zealanders get the best possible health care, quickly, and sometimes without having to leave home.*

The Healthline service is an example of this. Healthline receives an average of 1000 calls each day, often saving a trip to the doctor.

This is more convenient for the individual as it removes barriers such as cost and travel, and helps free up GPs to see those who are really sick.

But tele-nursing is just one example of

how things are changing.

Videoconferencing in some DHBs means patients can see a specialist in a city hospital, without leaving the rural area in which they live.

Texting is reminding people who are otherwise difficult to contact to have their immunisations and other health checks.

Prescriptions and referrals are increasingly being made electronically, and patient records can be transferred at the touch of a button.

Medibank Health Solutions is committed to continuing to give New Zealanders the best and most convenient telephone triage service, and is watching IT developments closely.

If you have ever wondered how Healthline's computerised clinical decision support system (CeCC™ or

Care Enhance Call Centre Software) works, you can now see for yourself at <http://tinyurl.com/hlinedemo>.

This is an online demonstration of the steps nurses are taken through, using our clinically rigorous, evidence-based triage system with many quality checks in place (in the clip, a membership number is requested – note that New Zealand callers to Healthline do not need a membership number).

Winter is often the busiest time of year for health services. Remember that Healthline provides free access for people seeking symptom assessment, general health information and provider information.

If you'd like more information about Healthline, or free fridge magnets to give out to patients and consumers, please don't hesitate to contact us at [healthline@gslnetwork.co.nz](mailto:healthline@gslnetwork.co.nz).

### Need some free resources?



Information pamphlets on the Healthline service are available in six languages (English, Māori, Samoan, Tongan, Korean and Chinese).

These, along with fridge magnets, can be ordered by sending an email to [healthline@gslnetwork.co.nz](mailto:healthline@gslnetwork.co.nz).



## Healthline clocks up 2.5 million calls

*Healthline celebrated a significant milestone in February when it answered its 2.5 millionth call.*

The call was taken by Healthline nurse Frith Walker, who said the nurses were told the 2.5 millionth call was coming up, but had no idea who would take it.

“I was pretty excited,” she said. “This is a good place to work and I think every day, as I log in to my computer, that New Zealanders are very lucky to have this system.”

Health Minister Hon Tony Ryall joined in the celebrations, visiting the Healthline call centre in Wellington and presenting flowers to Mrs Walker.

He also met a couple who believe their daughter’s life may have been saved by the advice they got from Healthline.

Mr Ryall said it was not uncommon to hear about people who believed a family member’s life had been saved thanks to a call to the free phone service.

“In the 11 years Healthline has been available in New Zealand, nearly 250,000 callers have been advised to seek emergency or other urgent care. More than



*Health Minister Hon Tony Ryall presents flowers to Frith Walker*

600,000 callers with less serious symptoms have been given advice on how to manage the condition at home.

“One of the most unusual requests was from a pilot who had called Healthline for advice about a passenger while in the air, and then asked which runway to land on!”

Mr Ryall said that around 20 percent

of hospital admissions are considered avoidable.

“The role of primary care is the most important area for reducing these admissions, and along with GPs and ambulance services, a telephone triage service like Healthline has an important role in primary care.”

## Family grateful for Healthline assistance

*The Cotton family were guests at the function celebrating Healthline’s 2.5 millionth call.*

Two years previously, Susan Cotton had rung Healthline, extremely concerned about her two-year old daughter Emily’s stomach pain.

“She would start screaming, then be OK for maybe 10 or twenty minutes, then she’d be off again.”

Susan took Emily to the doctor but while she was there she was fine and an examination showed nothing obvious.

Later that afternoon the pain began again. With the GP now closed Susan rang Healthline.

“While I was on the phone Emily was really screaming and the nurse could hear it.

“She asked me a whole lot of questions and then recommended I take Emily straight to Starship.”

The Healthline nurse was concerned Emily could be suffering from intussusception, where the bowel telescopes in on itself causing an obstruction.

She was right. The condition was confirmed by an ultrasound and Emily was successfully treated.

Her parents were told the condition, which mainly affects babies and young children, can be fatal if left untreated.

Emily, now four, along with her little brother and parents Jeff and Susan attended the celebration event in Wellington.

Emily took all the attention in her stride, smiling for the cameras and cutting the cake with the Minister.



*Emily Cotton cuts the cake with Health Minister Hon Tony Ryall*

## Healthline stall popular at CreekFest 2012

*Creekfest was a good opportunity for the Healthline service to be promoted to the local community.*



*Healthline had a stall at Creekfest, the annual health festival held in Cannons Creek, Porirua. Creekfest is a day for families, where key health messages are promoted and encouraged by participating stall holders.*

More than 35,000 people attended the event, which provided a good opportunity

for Healthline staff to talk with the local community about the free service.

Live stage entertainment performed by local and national artists was a major attraction and sports competitions between participating schools were also used to promote healthy action and encourage participation.

A big thank you to Healthline telenurses Pip Carter and Shirley Smith who helped to look after the Healthline stall at the event, and to Capital & Coast District Health Board for supporting Healthline to be there.

## Clinical audit finds robust systems, qualified staff

**Ian St George**  
Medibank Health Solutions New Zealand Medical Director



*A clinical audit of Healthline was undertaken at the end of last year at the request of the Ministry of Health, as part of its management of the contract with Medibank Health Solutions NZ for the delivery of the service.*

*Medical Director, Dr Ian St George, discusses the audit’s findings and the recommendations made.*

The audit was undertaken by former Chief Nurse and Professor of Nursing at the University of Auckland’s School of Nursing Dr Frances Hughes, and Suzanne Win, a past Chair of Nelson Marlborough District Health Board and Career Force.

The audit sought to establish the

appropriateness of the Healthline clinical governance structure; the electronic clinical decision support system used to deliver the Healthline service; the processes in place to ensure clinical guidelines and general health information are evidence-based and reflect current best clinical practice; Healthline nurses’ qualifications, training and ongoing professional development; and how Healthline clinical systems are applied by telenurses and monitored by team leaders and supervisors both in the contact centre environment, and by telenurses working at home.

The audit concluded Healthline is staffed by qualified and experienced registered nurses who appear to be well supported with clear processes for professional development.

Specifically, the audit found:

- robust clinical governance systems
- extensive accountability structures in place
- electronic systems were well understood by clinical staff and well supported by IT staff
- staff feel supported in roles
- there was effective induction, training and coaching.

The audit made some recommendations to further improve aspects of the service, related to data capture, external communication and cross referencing of documents within policies. These recommendations have now been substantially implemented.

## Last-minute call made all the difference

*Anne Rennie wasn't feeling well. She thought she'd sleep on it and decide what to do in the morning, but a decision to call Healthline first may have made all the difference.*

Anne Rennie had spent several months undergoing breast cancer treatment and had picked up a couple of infections during that time, which her specialist viewed as nothing too serious. But after having a mastectomy, a significant lesion developed on Anne's chest.

Her clinical specialist viewed the lesion on a couple of occasions and prescribed antibiotics. But after the specialist had removed fluid from the surgery site a second time, Anne knew something was very wrong.

"About two hours after I got home I had this sudden attack. The site was acutely painful, my whole body was shaking and I couldn't stop shivering. I suspected I had a temperature, so found a thermometer and went outside to try to cool down with a cold cloth."

Anne's temperature was high, but she was feeling sick and confused and didn't know what to do.

"I was in a bit of a state and probably wasn't thinking straight, so I thought I'd just go to bed and see how I felt in the morning. But before I went to sleep, I decided to give Healthline a quick call. I live alone and have no one to look after me, so I thought a professional second opinion was a good idea.

"The Healthline nurse listened very carefully to everything I had to say and recommended I see an emergency doctor immediately. She said what I was describing didn't sound normal at all!"

Anne ended up going to Waitakere Hospital where the emergency doctor, who she describes as absolutely brilliant, told her there would have been serious consequences had she not taken Healthline's advice. She was admitted to North Shore Hospital the next morning. Over the next week, a large abscess was found in her chest. Anne spent three weeks



Anne Rennie

in hospital and had surgery twice.

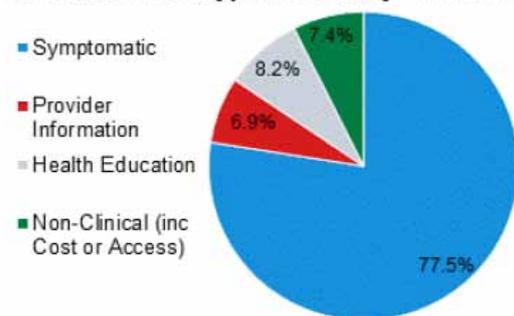
"I may be a bit biased because she saved my life," she says, "but the Healthline nurse I talked to was really lovely. Having to listen and give advice over the phone can't be easy, but I probably wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for that advice. Healthline is a truly wonderful service. I had a simple inquiry, but it had big implications!"

## Taking the pulse

Statistics from Healthline's most recent survey of caller trends and volumes, for the January to March 2012 quarter, show:

- 96,758 calls were received compared with 106,177 last quarter
- average number of calls a day – 1063
- 77.5 percent of callers required triage of symptoms
- 8.2 percent were provided with health education and information
- 6.9 percent sought provider referral information
- 65 percent of calls were received outside standard business hours
- Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays were the busiest days. However Tuesdays also appeared busier this quarter due to the timing of public holidays impacting on the availability of services
- the highest number of calls received concerned vomiting, colds, rashes and diarrhoea in children and abdominal and chest pain in adults
- Māori utilisation of the service is high with 19.1 percent of callers identifying themselves as Māori compared to representation in the general population of 14 percent
- Some DHBs have a higher usage than the national average. These include Auckland, Capital & Coast, MidCentral, Tairāwhiti and Wairarapa
- On 1 February, Healthline received its 2.5 millionth call.

### Healthline Call Types: January - March 2012



### Healthline Patient/Caller Demographics (n = 80950)

