



Quarterly Report: HealthDirect

January - March 2007

Introduction

HealthDirect was established in 1999 to provide telephone advice to the community on the urgency of an individual's need for health care. Since 1999 the number of calls to HealthDirect has steadily increased to approximately 20,000 per month.

A satisfaction survey in 2003 demonstrated 98% support for the service. A follow-up survey is being carried out at present and results will be available later in 2007.

Over the preceding 3 months the HealthDirect program recorded 120 compliments from customers and only 15 complaints. No serious adverse events were reported. The high number of compliments is one indicator of the success of the HealthDirect program in meeting customer needs.

Activity

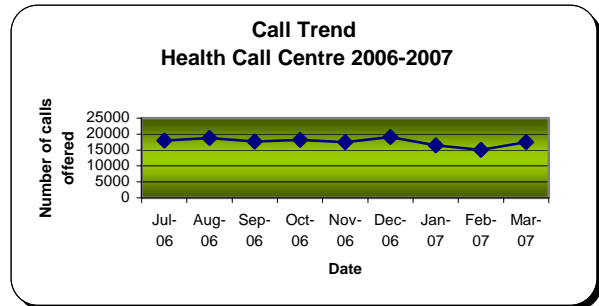
The number of calls handled by HealthDirect since July 2006 is provided in Table 1. It is clear from the table that the community of WA use this service frequently. Over the last year the call numbers appear to have plateaued, however, telephone triage is media sensitive and recent advertising in local community newspapers in February 2007 has resulted in a 17% spike in call volume. However, averaged over the last three months, only a small increase in call volume is evident.

Top 10 Presenting Problems

The top 10 presenting problems over the last 3 months are presented below in decreasing order. The high number of telephone calls relating to children is noteworthy.

- Vomiting (child)
- Medication questions
- Diarrhoea (child)
- Fever (child)

Table 1- Calls offered for combined triage and information services



- Abdominal pain
- Trauma to the head (child)
- Rashes (child)
- Chest pain
- Post-operative problems
- Colds (child)
- Headache

Health Call Centre Services

HealthDirect is one of the programs run by the WA Health Call Centre. This Centre carries out a range of telephone services to support the community. These include a health information service which provides advice on where health services are located and what times they are open, as well as printed material on health conditions. HealthDirect also provides secondary triage for people who call St John Ambulance with non-life-threatening medical needs, a Residential Care Line for nurses who need special advice on handling people who reside in nursing homes, an advice service for people who may have been exposed to HIV. The Health Call Centre also provides a triage (health advice) service to residents of the Northern Territory, a mental health service to the South West area of WA and telephone coaching for people with chronic illnesses. They also administer the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme in the South West.

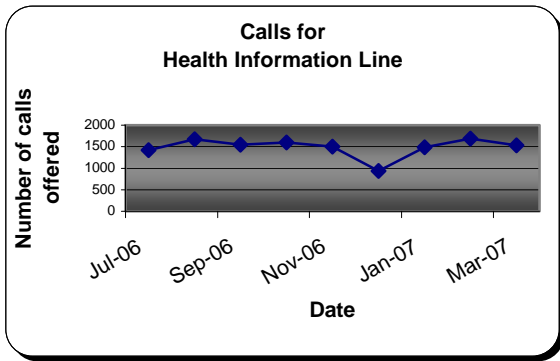


Health Information Line

The Health Information Line receives an average of 1500 calls per month. Individuals in the community call for information on the range and location of health services available to them and for printed material on health issues.

This telephone number is also used in cases of emergency where the public require information, for example, recently in Esperance regarding general information about the impact of lead on the body and lead testing. As per Table 2 the number of calls to the Information Line is stable with a dip through the Christmas holiday period.

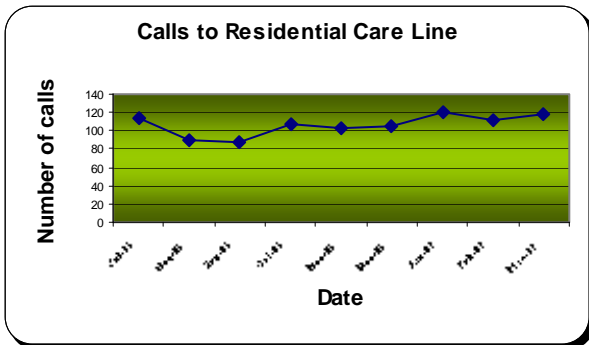
Table 2 Calls to the Health Information Line



The Residential Care Line

The Residential Care Line receives calls from nursing homes and the calls are answered by nurses with special training in caring for people in residential settings. The help provided over the telephone can often prevent a resident from having to be sent to a hospital emergency department. The numbers of calls handled is small, as per Table 3 - approximately 100 per month, however, saving an elderly person from an unnecessary hospital is a valuable enterprise.

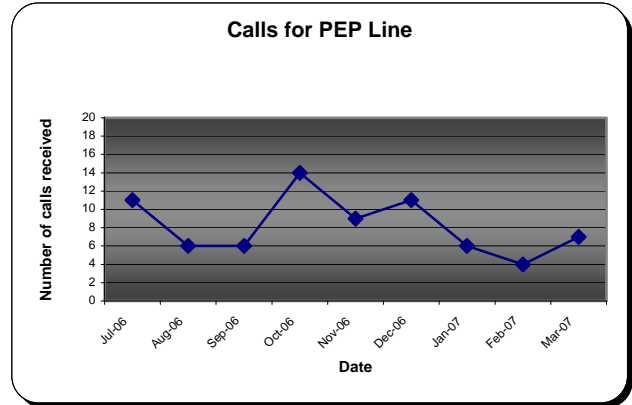
Table 3 Calls to the Residential Care Line



Postexposure Prophylaxis Line

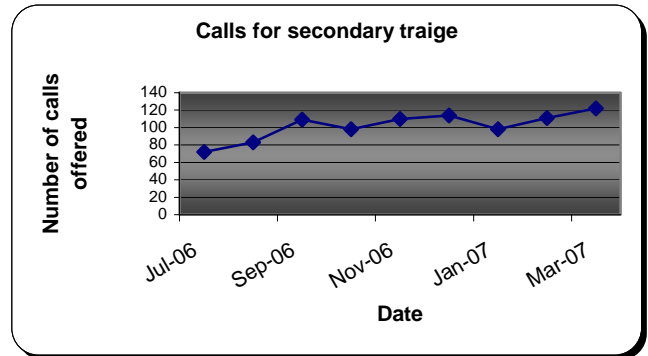
This line is used by people seeking advice about how to handle possible exposure to HIV. Although the number of calls to this line is low (Table 4), the program offers a valuable service to its clientele.

Table 4 Calls to Post Exposure Prophylaxis Line



Secondary triage

Table 5 Calls for secondary triage from St John Ambulance



The Health Call Centre provides secondary triage for people who have called an ambulance on the 000 number, but do not have a life-threatening health condition. Rather than travelling by ambulance to a hospital these people are offered advice on the urgency of their need for health care. On average, approximately 90% of these people are assisted without requiring an ambulance, leaving only 10% of callers requiring ambulance transport to hospital. Over the last three months approximately 300 emergency department presentations were saved. The DOH is working with the St John Ambulance to increase these referrals and reduce unnecessary ED presentations.