

## **BIG BROTHER CALLING?** **Roger Matthews**

A few years ago, concern was expressed at the new 'sweatshops' of the information age: principally call-centres, which have now, surely, become one of the trials of modern life.

As a customer, there is first of all the insurmountable obstacle of getting through: suddenly, it seems, no matter what time you ring, 'exceptional call volumes' are being received (even at 2am on a Sunday morning for one airline I won't mention).

Then there is the assault course that is the index page: press 1 for cancellations, 2 for new business, 3 for emergencies, 4 for a chat about the weather – *ad infinitum*. What was 1 again?

From the employee's side, however, a more sinister influence is at play. The sophistication of modern telephony means that every working (if not waking) second is logged by 'the system'.

Time taken to answer each call, time spent on each call, call outcome, toilet breaks, referral rates, customer feedback - all are recorded. And the supervisor can of course listen in silently to any of the many calls being taken across the ranks of telephone pods in the centre.

It's no wonder that of all industry sectors, call centres are infamous for their staff turnover and burnout rates. At one time, while 2% of the UK workforce worked in them, over 60% of staff lasted less than two years, while sickness rates could reach 35%.

Is the information age now finally reaching dentistry? The sheer amount of data being collected in the new pilot schemes appears to be on a par with the micro-management of performance detailed above.

Clearly, the powers that be have recognised that doing no piloting at all prior to 2006 was not a good idea. So the answer must be to pilot everything. From the patient's use of English to their tendency to cancel appointments at the last minute, everything is in there for analysis and review.

Thoroughness is to be commended in healthcare, of course, but when one has to get to page 24 (of 46) in the software instruction manual before considering what dental treatment the patient actually needs, it must be hoped that (unless of course a fee will be paid for data entry alone) considerable simplification is made before the system goes live.

-ends-

[375 words]

**Notes to Editors:**

**Roger Matthews MA BDS DGGP (UK) FDSRCS(Edin) - Chief Dental Officer**

Roger joined Denplan in 1995 having spent 20 years working in general dental practice and as a dento-legal advisor for the Medical Defence Union. He oversees dental advice to the company and its links with professional bodies, and is responsible for Denplan's professional services.