

FREE 24 HOUR HEALTH ADVICE  
**HEALTHLINE**  
0800 611 116  
A REGISTERED  
NURSE IS JUST A PHONE CALL AWAY

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## What is Healthline?

A nurse-led telephone service funded by the Ministry of Health that provides free, 24 x 7 access for people seeking

- symptom assessment and advice,
- general health information
- well child calls
- provider referral.

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## Aims

- Healthline would provide immediate advice for those who needed it most, and
- it would redirect callers to lower levels of care than they might otherwise have sought.



## Healthline

- ◆ McKesson New Zealand
- ◆ St John





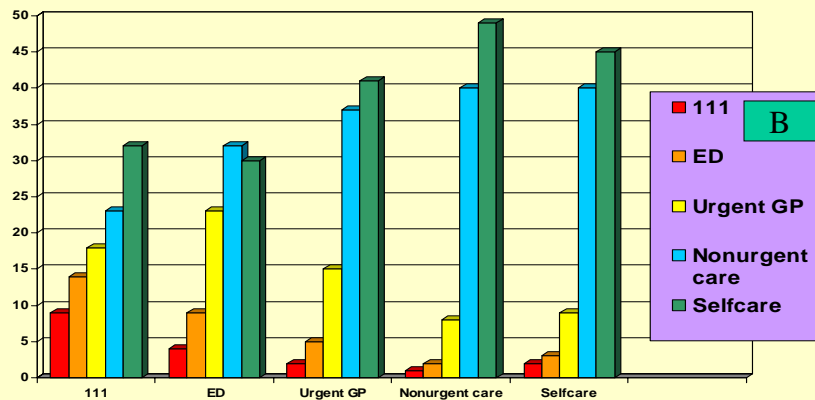
## NZ operation

- Call centres in Wellington and Auckland
- Virtual call centre
- Telephony and IT linked
- Ability to report extensively for QI

We ask, "what would you have done if Healthline had not been available?"

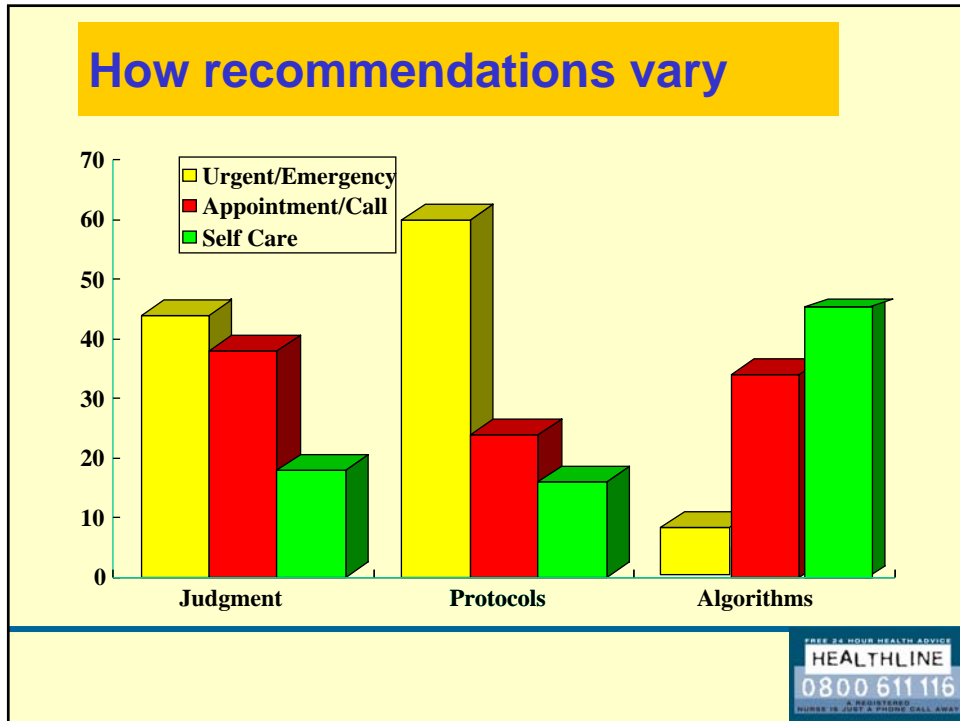


People with symptoms may need advice on the right place and the right time to seek care:  
100 callers intending (A) were triaged to (B)



A





... but is it safe?

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## Safe 1: standardised decision support software: CECC

- Binary branch logic and group symptom logic
- Allows for personal risk factors and distance from care
- Triage to the appropriate level of care



## Safe 2: continuous improvement

- Guidelines are evidence based and use clinician feedback
- Medical directors' and nurses' reviews
- Medical advisory group – provides formal feedback



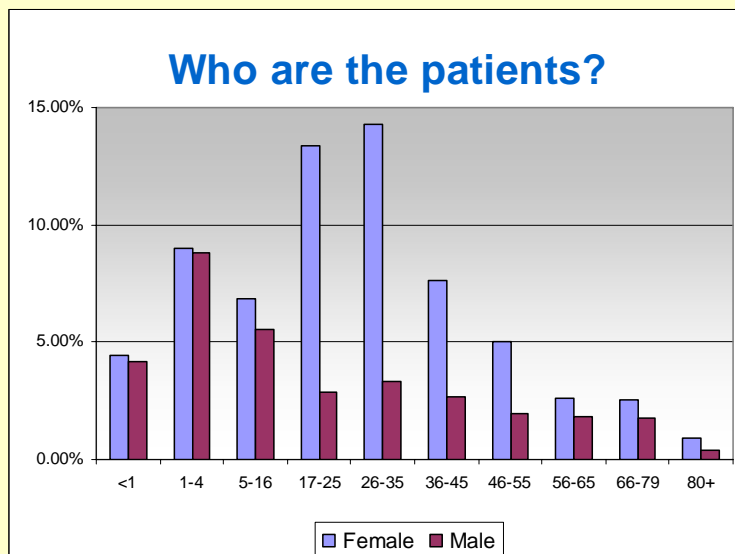
## Safe 3: doctors agree with the endpoints

- 3 primary care doctors examined 90 case records blind and decided what their triage endpoint would have been
- The differences among them was greater than the difference between their median and HL
- In only one case did they all agree the HL endpoint was unsafe, and in this case there was nurse error: the guideline itself was safe
- In all the cases they would have triaged to immediate care, HL had done so.

St George IM, Cullen M, Branney M. Healthline: do primary care doctors agree with the advice? Submitted to NZMedJ 2005.



## Who are the patients?



## Satisfaction

93% satisfied or very satisfied  
97% would use the service again  
97% would recommend it to another  
(n = 450; independent survey)



## Crisis calls to HL

- Crises accounted for 0.2% of all calls, more from women than men, mostly in the evening, mostly related to suicidal intent.
- Healthline can triage people in crisis to appropriate levels of care, and should not simply be seen as triage for self-limiting or minor conditions.

St George IM, Cullen M. Crisis calls to Healthline. *N Z Fam Phys*, 2003. 30: 40-41.



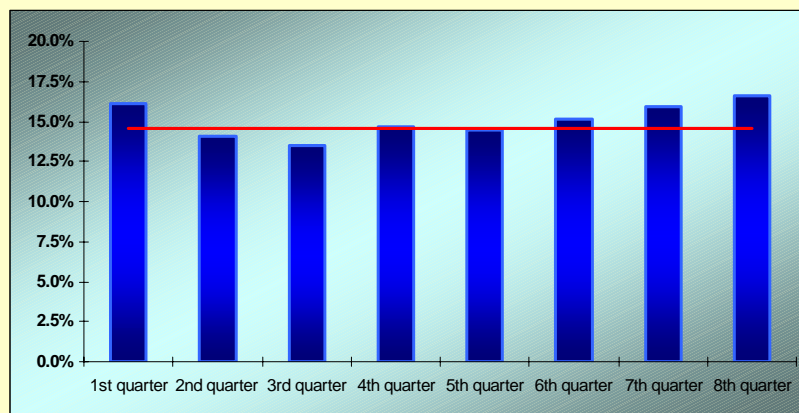
## Maori callers to HL

- Maori usage was slightly higher than that of nonMaori; Maori clients were more likely than nonMaori to be seeking triage of a symptom, and calls were more likely to be about infants.
- Healthline is an acceptable and accessible source of health advice for Maori.

St George IM, Branney M, Horo-Gregory W, Duncan L, Cullen M. Maori callers to a telephone triage service. *NZ Fam Phys*, 2003; 30: 261-263.



## Percent of callers who identified as Maori, compared with Maori representation in the population, by quarter

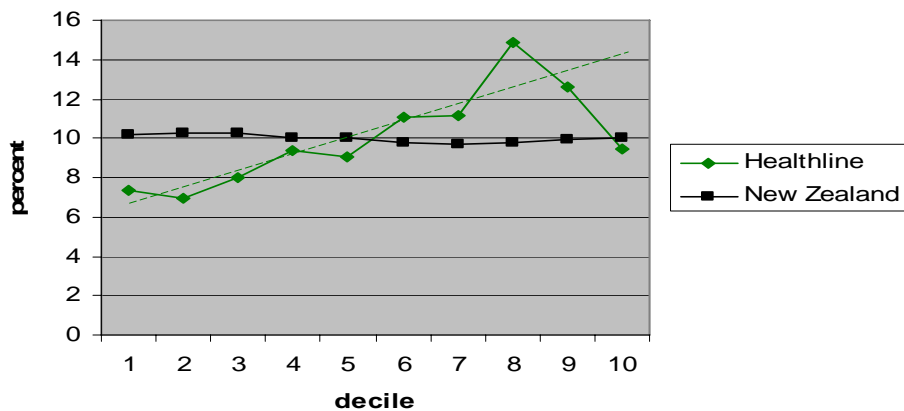


## Deprivation levels of HL callers

- a retrospective analysis of two one-week sample periods; routinely collected addresses of callers to Healthline were geocoded and matched with the NZDep2001 Index of Deprivation.

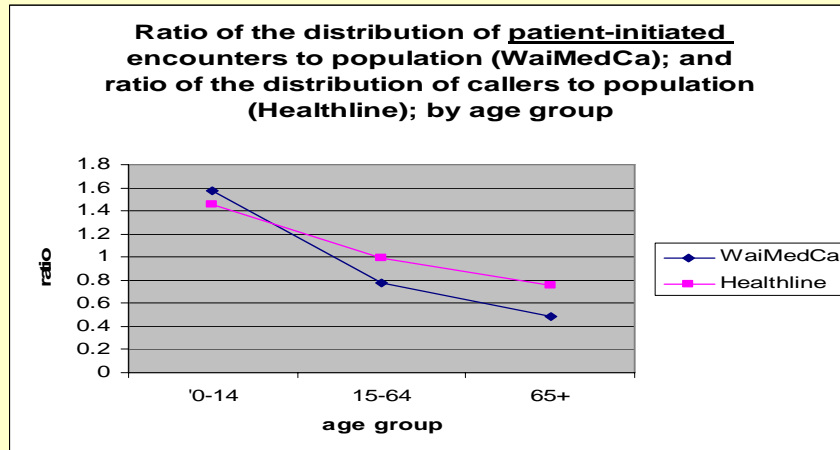
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**Distribution of calls to Healthline by deprivation decile, compared with distribution of NZ population.**



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## 65yrs+ callers to HL



## The effect for country doctors

- telephone triage of after hours calls to a rural medical centre resulted in reduced workload for the duty doctor.
- Healthline can help rural practices by triaging two out of three after hours calls away from the duty doctor.

St George IM, Cullen M, Branney M, Hogan M, Duncan L. Telephone triage reduces out-of-hours work for country doctors. *NZ Family Physician*, 2003. 30: 95-99



## The effect on an urban ED

- Healthline had little effect on overall ED census and appeared to refer patients with similar acuity to the general ED census.
- It decreased the workload for emergency department nursing staff charged with answering advice calls.

Graber DJ, O'Donovan P, Ardagh MW, St George IM. A telephone advice line does not decrease the number of presentations to Christchurch Emergency Department, but does decrease the number of phone callers seeking advice. *NZ Med.J.* 2003. 116 (1177): 495-501.

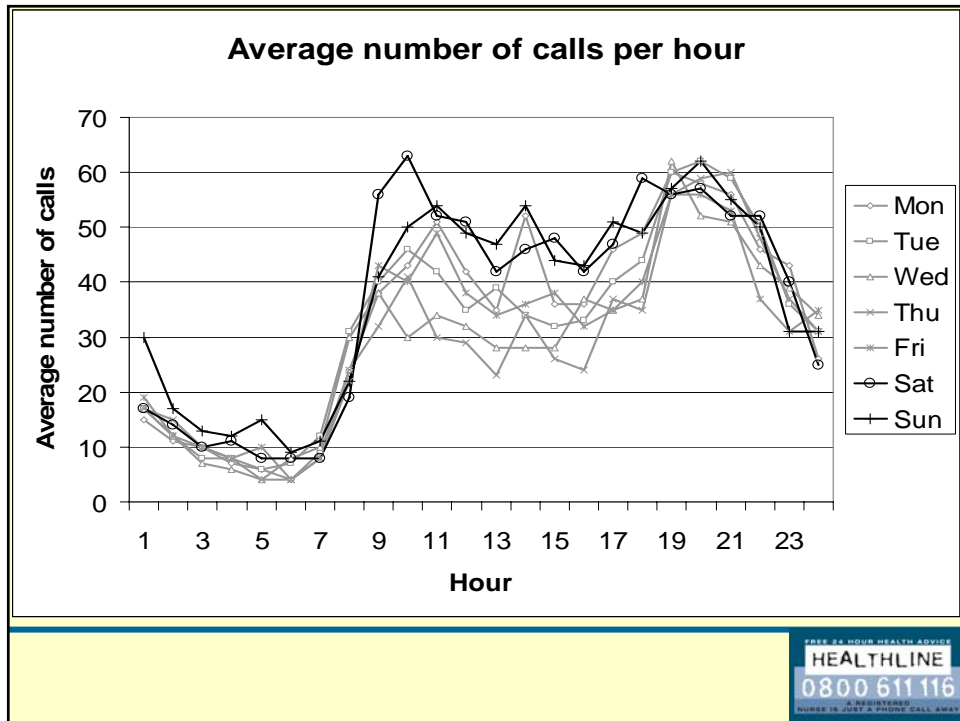
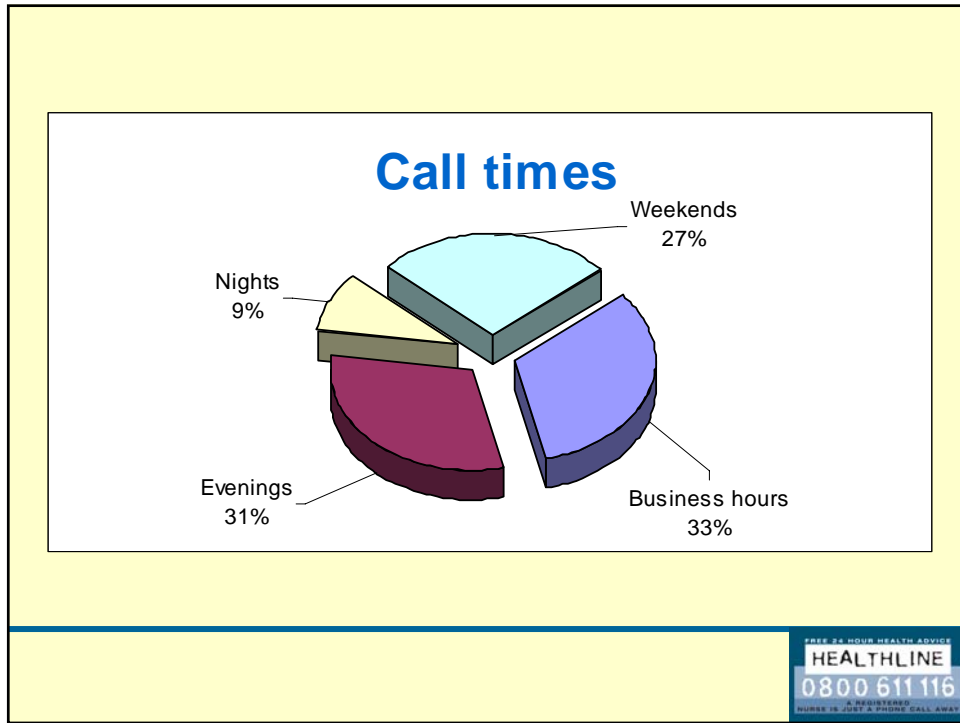


## After hours

Nurse triage is now an established part of after hours primary care

- It is remote so disconnected from local pressure
- It is well proved
- It provides consistent advice
- It works best if integrated with other primary care services.





## Healthline, then...

- Is safe
- Callers are satisfied
- Handles calls from all ages, of all levels of complexity and urgency, at all hours
- Is used by those who perceive barriers to primary health care: older people, Maori and the socioeconomically deprived
- Frees country doctors and urban ED staff for more apt duties



## The future?

- Syndromic surveillance
- Work@home
- Chronic disease management
- Waiting list management
- Secondary triage for ambulance
- *Ad hoc* lines as needed (eg SARS, flu pandemic, MENZ B line)



