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GPC meeting

The GPC met on 19 October 2006 and this newsletter provides a summary of the main items discussed.

Access DES Patient Experience Survey

The GPC has passed the following motion on the revised directed enhanced service for improved access.

"In the light of what the GPC considers to be a breach of the original agreement on the Access DES questionnaire, the committee now rejects the DES on the basis that the DES's integrity has been so discredited".

GPC negotiators had reluctantly agreed to the use of a patient survey to assess achievement in the revised access directed enhanced service for 2006/07, on the grounds that it was this only way to retain the £108 million for access in the GMS contract. For some months now, it has participated in the Board set up to implement the survey, which is to be carried out by Ipsos-Mori, and has felt increasingly alarmed at stated Government intentions to include extra questions in the survey questionnaire which had not been agreed in negotiations on the DES.

Although these questions will not be linked to GP pay, they are potentially pejorative and appear to invite patients to offer negative feedback about appointment arrangements in GP practices, no matter how they may have responded to the agreed questions relating to achievement in the DES. The extra questions also risk confusing patients and raising their expectations about extended opening hours even though these are not part of GPs' contractual arrangements and have not been the subject of negotiations. Indeed, the Department of Health has admitted that it cannot resource extended opening hours.

The whole committee has now had an opportunity to discuss these extra questions, and believes that their imposed inclusion in the survey questionnaire has now completely discredited an already unpopular DES.

The GPC will be producing a "Focus On" guidance document as soon as possible today, which will be available via LMCs and on the BMA website and will explain the implications for practices.

Report on main negotiating issues

Please find attached (appendix 1) the written report from the GPC negotiators submitted to the committee ahead of the meeting and revised in the light of the updates given at the meeting.

Contract negotiations update

Since the September 2006 GPC news report, negotiations with NHS Employers on stage 2 of the GMS contract review, intended for implementation in April 2007, have not progressed. The GPC has maintained regular contact with NHS Employers but no formal negotiations have taken place. The GPC has made it clear that it could only agree to negotiate on new services if the investment for them was available over and above the resources needed for a fair inflationary uplift across the contract.

As this looks extremely unlikely, the GPC has submitted detailed evidence to the DDRB asking it to recommend an inflationary uplift across all aspects of the GP contract. This evidence was made public this week and is available on the BMA website at www.bma.org.uk/ap.nsf/Content/DDRBevidence2006. Both NHS Employers and the Department of Health have also submitted evidence though this does not contain specific detailed information on GPs working under the GMS contract. Instead it states that "NHS Employers is currently in negotiations with the BMA's General Practitioners Committee regarding the arrangements for independent GMPs throughout the UK under the GMS contract for 2007/08. The negotiating parties will provide an update for the review body as part of supplementary evidence."

The GPC believe that submitting evidence and a request for an inflationary uplift to the DDRB was in the best interests of the profession. This will hopefully ensure that if parties cannot reach agreement, particularly on issues of inflation and efficiencies, the DDRB can offer an independent view. The GPC believes this course of action is preferable to negotiating a deal that is unacceptable to the profession, particularly following the efficiency savings offered in 2006/07 in return for an agreement that **value for money issues associated with the contract would not be revisited.**

Information Management and Technology (IM&T) update

Endorsement for GP2GP

JGPITC has endorsed the use of the updated version 1.0 Emis product for Emis to Emis record transfers in practices beyond those involved in the 'Early Adopter' Gateshead project. At the same time, the committee has also endorsed the use of the version 1.0 Vision 3 product for Vision to Vision record transfers in practices beyond those involved in the 'Early Adopter' Isle of Wight project.

QOF datasets and business rules

A list of remaining problems that we are aware of with Version 8.5 of the Business Rules and Datasets has been compiled. Recommendations and agreements are then noted where reached. If you know of any recent problems which you would like to raise, e-mail arivett@bma.org.uk

Data Accreditation

A meeting of the accreditation board is due to take place shortly. Further details will be released after the meeting and made public by the end of the year.

PCT funding of IT equipment

It has been brought to our attention that some PCTs are still refusing to fund the purchase of IT equipment and upgrades. We would ask to be kept informed when this occurs so the JGPITC can assist. Details should be sent to arivett@bma.org.uk

Pensions dynamisation

Following previous correspondence from the Department of Health suggesting the imposition of a cap on the pension dynamising factors arising from the first three years of the new contract, the GPC last week received further communication from Lord Warner, Minister of State (NHS Reform), setting out a revised proposed method for implementing the GP pensions dynamising factor for 2003 – 2006. The GPC has modelled the effect this would have on GP pensions and is clear that this revised method would not deliver what was agreed under the original contract arrangement, and would particularly disadvantage those GPs that have retired since April 2006.

The GPC made clear in its response to Lord Warner that failure to honour full dynamisation using the original agreed method and over the agreed timescale would be seen as a breach of the agreement between the NHS Confederation, Department of Health and GPC in 2003. Whilst the GPC is prepared to continue discussions to try to resolve the issue, the principle of honouring agreements is one that the GPC holds in high regard. Should the eventual decision remain unsatisfactory, the GPC will use every possible legal, economic and political weapon at its disposal to defend the new contract pension agreement. The Government will make no decision on pensions dynamisation until the end of November.

PMS and superannuation

This week the GPC became aware that Worcestershire PCT, following pressure from the LMC, will be funding PMS practices fully for 14% superannuation employer contributions. The GPC position has always been that, in accordance with the superannuation clauses in the PMS (Lockharts model) agreement, it is clear and unequivocal that PCTs entering into this contract are bound to pay these contributions. There is no discretionary element; this is a clear contractual obligation. Whilst this advice is based specifically on the Lockhart's model, there may be other contractual clauses that bind PCTs to pay full employer contributions.

Cases have been filed for dispute resolution on this matter and the GPC believes that the determination has always been in the favour of the practice rather than the PCT. Practices that want further information about whether their practice may be entitled to a similar claim, or the arguments used to pursue these claims, should contact their LMC or the GPC office directly.

GPC regional constituencies

The GPC discussed the GPC Regional Constituencies Paper - Proposals for Change from January 2007 that was recently distributed to LMCs for their feedback. Concerns were raised regarding the configuration of the East Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside region and also the size of the

South Central region. The Representation subcommittee was tasked with taking this away to give it further consideration and to look into any subsequent issues relating to the succession of GPC regional members and the BMA Bye-Laws.

In particular GPC will consult with the LMCs in the East Midlands and Yorkshire and Humber region and the South Central region. No other concerns were raised about the other regional changes.

A revised paper will be put to GPC in December.

Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace - Guidance from GPC Wales

Attached at appendix 2 is a recent document published by GPC Wales about bullying and harassment. The information contained within this document is appropriate across the UK and we hope that LMCs and practices will find it useful.

National Clinical Assessment Service Assessors (NCAS)

The NCAS has begun a recruitment campaign for 6-8 assessors in general practice, with substantial experience working in small practices or in situations of urban deprivation or with minority ethnic groups in order to enhance the NCAS assessor panel.

Advertisements for the posts are being published, with a deadline for applications of 12 January 2007. Further details are attached at appendix 3.

<p>The GPC next meets on 16 November 2006, and LMCs are invited to submit items for discussion. You may like to review these, beforehand, with the representatives in your area who serve on the GPC. The closing date for items is 8 November. It would be helpful if items could be emailed to Angela Button at abutton@bma.org.uk. You may also like to use the GPC's listservers to exchange views and ideas.</p>
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GPC News

GPC News is available via the Internet, via the BMA's web pages:
<http://www.bma.org.uk>

LMCs are reminded that their regional representatives can provide more detailed information about the issues covered in GPC News, and other matters. Other members of the GPC would also be pleased to accept invitations to LMC meetings wherever possible. Their names and addresses are in the GPC Yearbook. The secretariat can also provide a written background brief if required, but it would be helpful to have such requests well in advance of your meetings.

Finally, if LMCs require assistance on local issues, they can also contact the BMA's local offices: addresses are on page 3 of the GPC's yearbook.

This newsletter has been sent to:

- Secretaries of LMCs and LMC offices
- Members of the GPC
- Members of GP registrars' subcommittee
- Members of the sessional GPs subcommittee