

Chair's Report 2023/24

Dr. Iain Morrison

The past year has been yet another challenge for many practices and the short to medium term future of General Practice remains precarious. It has been exceptionally busy at the LMC, continuing to work relentlessly in representing our 115 practices, LUCS and sessional GPs in what is an increasingly difficult environment.

Work on the 2018 contract continues. Six years in and no real prospect of full delivery in the next sixty. We have had some benefits but for the amount of money invested in it, few would argue it is being well spent. Few practices can afford to fundamentally change their business model on the back of services provided to offer more time for the expert medical generalist. This is mainly down to not enough front line resources being deployed, nor their reliability and efficiency being good enough to offer dependency.

Negotiations for the revered phase two of the contract have not taken place nor are planned. This leaves practices with ongoing risks and exposures that were supposed to be mitigated by now. The work on premises protections has been slow and we are aware tranche 2 of GP sustainability loans have been postponed, "sometime" into 24/25.

However, we will endeavour to protect the services added through 2018 and make them all as efficient and beneficial to Practices as possible. We are moving ahead with local specification and policy having seen so little come from a national level apart from promises of imminent delivery which has only served to delay our local progress.

One of the biggest risks to many of our constituents is NHS Lothian's Estates "cost realisation" exercise, which has produced a staggering £1.6m uplift to the bills for 66 practices. The initial proposal was to recover this in year, which would have led to the immediate destabilisation of many practices across Lothian. After significant protestation and negotiation, the LMC persuaded the Board to introduce this uplift iteratively over a three year period. At least this gives Practices time to adjust to the additional cost, at the same time as contest any fees that are not justified or warranted under existing arrangements. We will continue to support all practices as best we can.

As I write, we are also seeking clarity on whether the hike in employer superannuation contributions will be supported by Government or not. Failure to protect will be another major financial insult to all Partnerships.

It is clear the next two fiscal years are going to be the most difficult in the history of the NHS with NHS Lothian looking to make 7% in year savings in the 24/25 budget. This is to be compounded in 25/26. This historic level of defunding means will lead to the degradation of multiple services. The fallout of this will undoubtedly affect General Practice as the most accessible point of the NHS

These issues, on the backdrop of an ongoing recruitment and retention crisis and demographic changes, can make one question the viability of the current model of General Practice. However, I was heartened to see so many attend our recent Roadshow event where, despite laying bare the challenges we all must face, there was clear resolve to take control of the situation and do what we can to protect our values and community.

The work that has been lead by Annie Lomas in producing the interface document allows practice to review what unresourced work they can push back on. Practices are seriously reviewing Enhanced

Services with a move to withdraw from those there no longer is a business case for. The Workload Guidance we have worked hard on producing is giving more and more practices confidence in introducing capitation to an insatiable demand.

The GP community is far stronger united and offering a unified response to the challenges we face is far more constructive and protective than at practice level. We will continue to lobby hard for additional investment, despite this being more challenging than ever, and be clear that without supporting General Practice, the bedrock of the NHS, free access to healthcare will become untenable.

It remains a great privilege to represent you and I have confidence that we will navigate through these challenges together.