



Flash Bulletin-important **April 2006**

Dear Colleague,

Appraiser funding/locum reimbursement

I am writing to keep you informed of our negotiations with the PCTs following their recent announcement concerning their proposals to cease appraiser funding and the locum reimbursements for maternity, paternity, adoption and sick leave.

The LMC are fully aware of the strength of feeling that exists amongst you in relation to these impending cuts. The LMC in turn has had vigorous discussions with West Gloucestershire PCT, who lead for the 3 PCTs on primary care, and have reiterated the discontent thus far expressed.

On the subject of cessation of appraiser funding, I have been in contact with many LMCs around the country who have all given their support for our stance that the PCTs are wrong and, indeed, many have expressed their outrage and have suggested such actions as contacting the various parliamentary spokespersons, the chief medical officer and the GMC in order to highlight our concerns.

I have liaised with the GPC offices as well and they have again supported us; they are quite clear in their view that the Department of Health guidance is such that appraisers should be funded by the PCTs. They have also informed me that, in the event of the PCTs not backing down, that they will take the matter further directly with the Department.

As far as the reimbursements for maternity and sickness leave are concerned I would acknowledge that there is some potential for confusion in the actual wording of the relevant guidance. The SFEs refer to a maximum level of reimbursement and comment that the payments are discretionary. However, it is also stated that "PCTs must fund...contractors" and once again the GPC offices are fully supportive of our view that the PCTs are in the wrong.

The LMC are also of the opinion that, not only would it be morally wrong to deprive a practice of locum reimbursement, particularly in a smaller practice, but also that the PCTs might be acting discriminatorily or possibly illegally, in refusing to fund maternity reimbursements. Of particular concern to us are those practices who have already or are about to engage long term locums without any prior notice of the PCTs' proposals.

The LMC met in full, with the usual PCT representatives, to discuss the two issues. I am sorry, but not surprised, to report back that the PCTs have not changed their views and consequently I will be formally writing to the GPC to request them to take matters further. This is likely therefore to take several more weeks to resolve and I wanted to hence write and let you know of the situation as things now stand. I remain confident that the LMC are in the right in their assessment of the situation and that a satisfactory resolution will eventually arise.

In the meantime the LMC are of the strong opinion that appraisers should not provide appraisals without adequate funding and that the suggestion that practices take on the responsibility of payment is totally unacceptable. The LMC remains hopeful but not optimistic that appraisals already carried out in April will be paid for. We are expecting further information from the PCTs very shortly.

The LMC fully understands and appreciates the financial crisis currently facing the NHS and that PCTs are tasked with making extremely difficult decisions at present. However, we are also strongly of the opinion that it is wholly inappropriate to expect any GP to directly or indirectly fund any of this deficit out of his or her own pocket and the LMC remains committed to fully fight your corner.

Finally several members of the LMC have agreed to meet with the PCTs shortly in an attempt to offer some suggestions as to where the PCTs might wish to seek to make savings within the primary care arena. A few ideas have already been postulated and the LMC has expressed their desire to work with rather than against the PCTs in the current climate. If any practices or individuals have any suggestions which they would like us to put forward to the PCTs please feel free to feed them into the LMC office. Nonetheless I repeat, though, that our ultimate aim is to protect the interests of all GPs and in particular their income.

Andrew Seymour
LMC Chairman