

Premises Rent Increases

The GPC is investigating concerns raised by LMCs about reports received from PCTs that, from next year, rent increases for practices will not automatically be funded, and the further rumours circulating that PCTs will not continue to automatically review rents every three years.

The GPC believes that there is an unequivocal statement (para 42) in the NHS (General Medical Service - Premises Costs) (England) Directions 2004 which allows for this. This states that:

42. Where a PCT grants an application of the type mentioned in direction 41, subject to the following provisions of this Part, the amount that it must pay to a contractor in respect of notional rent is the current market rental value of its practice premises, as determined in accordance with Parts 1 and 3 of Schedule 2. The PCT must review this amount as part of a three yearly review of the contractor's notional rent, although this review may be brought forward if—

- (a) there is a change to the purposes for which the premises are used;
- (b) there is further capital investment in the premises, and payments are to be made to the contractor in respect of that investment under its GMS contract.

The Department are checking with their premises expert.

Unnecessary GP paperwork

A new campaign has been launched to remind patients that they don't need their GP to countersign passport applications or issue certificates for absence for short-term sick leave. Although this has been the case for several years, many patients are unaware that over 40 other professions can countersign passport applications and that "self certification" of absences of less than 7 days is allowed.

Posters will be sent to practices shortly.



QOF – Mental Health Indicator

The following changes have now been agreed to the Mental Health Indicator 5, i.e. "The percentage of patients on lithium therapy with a record of lithium levels in the therapeutic range within the previous 6 months".

- That the therapeutic range for serum lithium levels be changed to 0.4 – 1.0 mmol/l
- That the upper achievement threshold for this indicator be increased to 90%
- That these changes are introduced from April 2005

Practices are reminded that where practices have agreed a locally valid range for their PCOs for 2004-05, they will still receive all the appropriate QOF points. This is because QMAS has the ability for practices to raise issues about their final achievement on any particular indicator with the PCO. The PCO can then agree that the practice has met the achievement within the local range before the practice agrees to the final sign off.

Locum Fees

Derbyshire LMC recently conducted a survey of fees paid by practices to locums in Derbyshire. Unfortunately there are difficulties in publishing the results of this survey. In the past the BMA has published a range of suggested fees but in 2000 the Office of Fair Trading ruled that publication of these fees was anti-competitive in the context of the Competition Act 1988. Members of a cartel (an arrangement between two providers not to compete with each other, whether written or verbal, formal or informal) can be fined heavily if found to be arranging fees in any way. The BMA appreciates that employers and freelance GPs would welcome guidance on how to set their own fee and has set up a Working Group to produce clear guidance to support all parties involved in negotiating for GP freelance services.

Practice Based Commissioning – technical guidance

The Practice Based Commissioning guidance published in December promised further technical guidance to help practices and PCTs implement Practice Based Commissioning. The technical guidance was published on 23 February and provides information on establishing practice level budgets, risk management, use of efficiency gains, management costs and the values and principles underpinning Practice Based Commissioning.

You can access the technical guidance on the Department of Health website: www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/10/41/53/04104153.pdf

However, the GPC believes that the document raises more questions than it answers. Although information is given on setting default budgets a lot of the decision making on financial allocations will take place at local level and information on how these decisions will be taken is not clear.

The guidance also explicitly links Practice Based Commissioning with the Choose and Book electronic referral system. The uptake of Choose and Book has been very low because many doctors fear that the system is not workable. Linking the two systems may act as a deterrent for practices to take on the new commissioning role.

The GPC will be producing its own guidance for doctors to help them get the necessary information from their PCTs to enable them to decide whether or not to take on the commissioning role.

How to contact us

Derbyshire LMC office is at Norman House, Friar Gate, Derby DE1 1NU. Our telephone number is 01332 210008, fax 01332 341771, email office@derbyshirelmc.org.uk or shelley.robtham@derbyshirelmc.org.uk.

The two Practice/PCT Liaison Officers are Melanie Beatham for Southern Derbyshire and Kate Lawrence for North Derbyshire. Their email addresses are: melanie.beatham@derbyshirelmc.org.uk and kate.lawrence@derbyshirelmc.org.uk.

We should be very interested to have your views on this newsletter and/or the LMC précis and website.

Trent LMCs Buying Group

You will shortly receive a newsletter from Trent LMCs Buying Group giving an update on the latest deals on goods and services which are available to LMC levy-paying practices. The object of the Buying Group is to boost GP practice income by obtaining discounts on vaccines, other pharmaceutical products, consumables and services.

Further information is available on the Derbyshire LMC website - click the tab "Trent Buying Group" and follow the instructions on screen. Your password is your practice code (i.e. C followed by 5 digits).

Community Hospitals

The latest guidance for GPs working in community hospitals has been published by GPC in the "Focus on..." series and can be found on the LMC website (click the "Focus on" tab at www.derbyshirelmc.org.uk.) This sets out the measures that the GPC is taking to improve the situation for community hospital GPs, including the recently negotiated Powys (Wales) agreement.

Licensing and Revalidation

The introduction of licensing and revalidation by the GMC has now been put on hold until a review of issues highlighted in the Shipman Inquiry's fifth report has been completed. The review will be led by Sir Liam Donaldson, Chief Medical Officer of England.

The GMC will be writing to all doctors to explain the current position and further developments will be reported on the GMC website: www.gmc-uk.org

www.derbyshirelmc.org.uk

