

(vi) Longer-term strategy and wider issues

The profession faces a significant challenge over the next three years. This poll concentrates on the immediate issues of pay and conditions for GPs although it should not be viewed in isolation from the medium term impact of English government policy which is moving towards the commercialisation and privatisation of the NHS.

The GPC is concerned that the governments' negotiating tactics are part of a wider strategy to increase the role of the private sector in the future structure and running of general practice. Any such move would undermine the personal, list-based system of general practice that is so valued by the vast majority of patients. Removing funding from existing GP practices may allow government to fund the development of these. Whatever the outcome of the poll, it is imperative that GPs continue to engage in the wider strategy, including lobbying MPs and informing patients, to support and develop modern general practice, including limiting the privatisation agenda which, I believe, will threaten not only existing GP providers but also holistic, high-quality patient care.

In the longer term there are key aims for negotiation in terms of preserving and improving the contract, whilst securing the future of general practice. Other objectives include stopping the progressive dismantling of General Practice, the unpicking of the 2003 GMS contract and protecting PMS practices from further de-funding. This means that all of us have to remain united in our professional messages to our patients about what we think is happening to the NHS. We also have to limit the privatisation agenda, maintain a large base of independent contractors and alter the public view of general practice. The number of Darzi centres that are set up and whether this becomes a model for further waves beyond the those currently planned, the prevalence of Alternative Provider Medical Services (APMS) and who is running them, public recognition of the need to preserve general practice, positive change in government policy and whether there is a future for principled negotiations with the UK government is likely to be determined by this united campaign.

These strategies are already being put in place and should continue throughout 2008 and beyond.