Questions to ask your local PPCs (prospective parliamentary candidates)
Healthcare is a key election issue for political parties and so the PPCs in your area will want to be fully informed on both local and national health issues. The lead up to a General Election is an ideal opportunity for doctors to try to influence the views of the person who may become their next MP, and to ask questions about their priorities if they are elected on 12 December 2019.

The following questions are based on the BMA’s manifesto for health in which we have set out our priorities for any incoming government. For further questions, ask your PPCs how they will deliver each of the BMA’s priorities for health. The manifesto can be read on our website here: bma.org.uk/manifesto-for-health

What would you and your party do to tackle the pensions crisis that is driving senior doctors out of the workforce?

A BMA survey shows that more than a third of doctors have already reduced their work commitments over pension tax charges; of those who haven’t already, a third plan to do so. Without action, the staffing of services is in severe jeopardy as doctors are being forced to reduce their working commitments in the face of significant, and often unexpected, pension tax charges.

The BMA is calling on the next government to implement reform of these punitive pension taxation measures, including scrapping the annual allowance in defined benefit schemes.

What will you and your party do to ensure there is fair remuneration for doctors to improve recruitment and retention in the NHS?

Since 2008, doctors have experienced the largest drop in earnings of all professions subject to pay review bodies. Fair remuneration and terms and conditions for all doctors will save money in the long run and provide staffing solutions that improve recruitment and retention, reduce absence and lead to happier, more productive staff.

The BMA is calling on the next government to deliver pay increases which truly value our medical workforce and commit to introducing a mechanism to address historic underpayments to doctors.

How would you and your party ensure there are enough doctors in my constituency to meet patient need?

Nine in 10 doctors tell the BMA that staffing levels are not adequate, and that they work in a climate in which they are fearful that systemic pressures and lack of capacity will cause them to make an error. With at least 10,000 medical vacancies, there are currently too few doctors to meet the growing needs of patients.

The BMA is calling on next government to enshrine ministerial and commissioner accountability for staffing levels across UK health services in legislation, so that individual clinicians are not blamed when the system places them under unmanageable pressure.
What commitments will you and your party make to ensure the health service has the investment it needs?

The NHS is overstretched and underfunded, putting health services under unsustainable pressure. After years of underinvestment, the system is struggling to cope with year-round pressures, leaving patients suffering long waits and doctors and their colleagues with rock-bottom morale.

The British Medical Association (BMA) is calling on the next government to increase NHS spending across the UK by at least 4.1% per year – including respective Barnett formula increases – to put the NHS on a sustainable long-term footing, and to address the gap between funding of current services and future demand.

Given what we know about the challenges and risks Brexit presents to the NHS, what would you and your party do to ensure patient care is not impacted by any Brexit outcome?

It has become increasingly clear that no Brexit deal will ever deliver the kinds and range of benefits which the UK’s current membership of the EU confers on patients, the medical workforce and health services across the UK and Europe.

A no-deal Brexit, in particular, will have damaging consequences for patients, the health workforce, health services, medical research and medical education across the UK and Europe. Every step must be taken to avoid it.

The BMA is calling on the next government to give the public a final say on any proposed Brexit deal.

What would you and your party do to promote wellbeing, reduce health inequalities, and increase life expectancy for constituents?

Public health funding has been repeatedly cut despite hospital admissions relating to obesity, smoking, and alcohol misuse rising. Putting prevention at the heart of the healthcare system would significantly decrease health service uptake and reduce system pressure.

The BMA is calling on the next government to prioritise prevention by reversing public health cuts and investing in services, while also ensuring the public health workforce are motivated, properly resourced and mobilised across the system.

What are the key measures you and your party would take to reduce the impact of climate change on health?

As doctors, we know only too well that poor air quality leads to serious illness, even death, and can affect not just our breathing, but people with diabetes, heart disease and dementia. Extreme environmental changes and the resulting risk of disease and infections are also major health concerns that will further exacerbate poverty and inequalities.

The BMA is calling on the next government to tackle the lethal levels of air pollution across the country by introducing legally binding limits on air pollutants, and to introduce policies to deliver carbon neutrality by 2030.
How would you help create a learning culture in the NHS where staff feel able to raise concerns without fear or blame, knowing they will be acted on to improve patient care?

Doctors work in pressurised environments with insufficient capacity and resource. In a recent BMA survey, 78% of doctors said a lack of resources is affecting the quality of patient care. As a profession, we feel increasingly fearful of being unfairly blamed for errors (reflected in our profession’s response to the case of Dr Bawa-Garba). In response to a BMA survey, an overwhelming majority (95%) of doctors say they are sometimes, or often, fearful of making mistakes and many (55%) say they are more fearful than they were five years ago.

The BMA is calling on the next government to adopt an approach to investigations that asks ‘what has happened’ and not ‘who is to blame’. It is vital that providers and regulators recognise the impact of patient safety incidents on doctors and provide them with support.