

Professional fees committee

Written report to the ARM 2023

The PFC (professional fees committee) has met 3 times this session and has been actively engaged in efforts to increase fees for doctors and effectively to represent members. This report to the representative body summarises the challenges encountered by the committee in these areas.

The PFC's work consists of negotiation and advocacy over a range of fees worth approximately £700 million pa. We have continued to negotiate with both local and national government agencies and departments and the private sector, to secure higher fee rates for doctors providing private and/or non-contractual services. Last September the DVLA, admitted that their fees are far out of date. To this end, we expected an announcement of an uplift in these fees in March, and yet despite prompting there has been no update. We continue to press this matter, but we suspect both the dead hand of Treasury and retaliatory blocking by government departments in the wake of the IA for the delays.

Ongoing discussions have occurred with the DWP regarding their outdated fees, however the DWP have been less receptive to our calls for an increase in fees. We are considering the production of a comparative table of the current fees and what they should be applying even the modest CPI inflator.

In this post-COVID world, we find that many public servants are hesitant to meet in-person, are working from home and, as such, are uncontactable except passively by email. Negotiations have not progressed as much as we would have liked. Increasingly, we believe, that this is a deliberate government tactic to delay meeting us, to prolong discussions and avoid paying reasonable fees.

We continue to represent the interests of members, particularly in getting fair pay and uplifts in agreed fees.

Like other parts of the profession, we have been hindered by deliberate government policy of funding constraints. Many departments and agencies are subject to severe budgetary cuts/restrictions, which has subsequently spilled over into our professional fees. The Government are effectively funding the public service through the pay erosion, with doctors being emotionally blackmailed through fear of damaging on the patient/doctor relationship.

Our policy now must now focus on

- a) Educating the public that only services encompassed in the NHS Acts are free - all others being chargeable.
- b) Educating doctors in the areas of work where they have no absolute obligation to deliver services,
- c) Educating doctors to use the Fee Calculator published by the BMA to create a personalised fee scale.
- d) Encouraging doctors to rebut unrealistic commissions with a realistically priced quote on a take it or leave it basis.
- e) Supporting doctors where they encounter resistance to their responses.
- f) Reminding government departments, public agencies, and private businesses that a doctor's time is not an ever elastic free or subsidised good to be plundered through emotional blackmail.
- g) Reinforcing the concept that doctors' services, skills, and professional responsibilities deserve to be rewarded properly together with reimbursement of expenses incurred delivering such services.

Peter Holden
Chair, professional fees committee