

**Embargo : 00.01hrs Thursday 12 June 2008**

## **Over a million people say no to the government's plans for general practice**

Over a million people<sup>1</sup> have signed a BMA petition calling on the government to support existing GP practices and urging it to stop encouraging large commercial companies into primary care in England.

The number of signatures, which were gathered over a three week period, shows the huge concern among patients, the public and doctors over government plans for general practice and the impact creeping commercialisation could have on the NHS.

In his speech to today's Local Medical Committee (LMC) conference, Dr Laurence Buckman, chairman of the BMA's GPs Committee will tell GPs that when the petition is handed in to Downing Street "it will deliver a stark message to the Prime Minister."

As part of Lord Darzi's review of the NHS, every Primary Care Trust in England has been told it has to have a new GP-led health centre (often referred to as a polyclinic). The private sector is being encouraged to bid to run these new centres and doctors do not believe the bidding process allows for anything like a level playing field. Patients and GPs fear large commercial firms may put the wishes of shareholders before the needs of patients.

The BMA also believes the government's plans could affect continuity of care because the contracts are being offered on a short term basis<sup>2</sup>, making it difficult to plan for long term health services and potentially leading to a much higher turnover of GPs within a practice.

Dr Buckman will also tell the conference:

"If the government won't listen to you, their doctors, then surely it will listen to the 1.2 million men and women who call for a halt to the plans to promote the use of commercial companies in general practice. Voters don't want funding to move from GP practices to commercial companies who are accountable primarily to shareholders rather than patients. They want to be treated as patients, not customers.

"My message to Gordon Brown is this: Whatever you think of GPs, take note of what your electorate thinks. Work with us to improve the service, not against us, and ignore at your peril the wishes of the most important people in the NHS – the patients."

At 2pm today (Thursday 12/06/08) Dr Buckman will lead a deputation to 10 Downing Street where he will hand over the Support Your Surgery petition within a giant birthday card celebrating the NHS at 60.

**Note to editors:**

1. **1,196,000** signatures had been counted at the time of issuing the press release. Dr Buckman will provide a final figure when he gives his speech at 09.50 hrs Thursday 12/06/08 at the LMCs Conference being held at the Institute of Education, London WC1H 0AL. The Agenda can be found at : <http://www.bma.org.uk/ap.nsf/Content/LMCConfJune2008>
2. These new clinics are likely to be run under APMS contracts (Alternative Provider Medical Services), which are the contracts that allow commercial firms to come into primary care. They are typically being offered for five years.

The wording of the patients' petition is as follows:

In the 60th year of the NHS, we the undersigned petition the Prime Minister to:

- Continue to support our existing NHS GP surgeries
- Improve services to patients by further investment in existing GP surgeries

We also urge the government to halt its plans to promote the use of commercial companies in general practice because this risks destabilising our local surgeries and threatens the comprehensive, high quality care we receive from our GPs. We don't want public funding to move from GP practices to commercial companies who are accountable primarily to shareholders rather than patients. Also we want to be treated by GPs who see us as patients, not as customers.

Ends