

## LMC Conference Review.

The longstanding unease about the LMC Conference remains unresolved and there is a need for a more radical and widely based review to encompass both its immediate functions and reflect its wider roles.

This approach is in response to last year's call by the Conference Chairman for new ideas.

The Conference is not simply the occasion for general practice to consider the GPC's record of its stewardship in its Annual Report\*\*\* (the equivalent to a Company's Annual Account to its Shareholders); or for the profession in turn to voice its opinions, important as these matters are. In addition to its central position in the complex relationship between the nations' general practitioners and the GPC representing them, the Conference also has an important communication role in the profession's relationships with all others involved in primary care, because that occasion is the prime opportunity to gain national attention through the media. These other 'stakeholders' include the nation, our patients, who need to be informed of the state of the service, and whose support through the ballot box is needed to address its problems and deficiencies, and also the government and health departments who act on its behalf. Other emerging and potential stakeholders include those aspects of the private sector whose participation in the funding and servicing of the NHS and general practice is increasingly evident.

Also of significance to the Conference are the representational consequences of the changing background elements – such as the geographic and contractual fragmentation of general practice into vulnerable 'bite-sized' components of a once unified professional mass with common terms and conditions and the devolutionary changes pointing to an increasingly regionalised service.

No less significant are the present and potential organisational and administrative changes in management and communication.

Viewed in this context the more recent reviews of the Conference seem seriously inadequate - akin to 'band-aid' repairs in response to minor complaints, rather than a serious dispassionate overall review to enable the profession to meet the future proactively. Any worthwhile review needs to be built on a broader canvas than that of the agenda committee, whose role and function also fall into question, so that the more fundamental issues can be addressed.

Within the **general context** what sort of issues stand to be considered and innovations tried?

- How can communications with the profession, public and government be improved – an ever present question?
- Is there not a role for a formal Conference Report to the profession and / or stakeholders?
- What role could a Conference web site play in terms of both input and output?
- Would an LMC poster side exhibition promote good practice and better understanding among committees?
- Is there a more positive role for regional representation, co-ordination or conferences?
- Why not regional mini conferences entitled to forward motions to the Conference?
- Are there ways of linking the Conference more closely with the other health professional groups?

Within **the Conference** structure itself

So that the machinery can be simplified and improved to -

- Modify the agenda management by transferring the responsibility for :-
  - the agenda material and conference administration to the GPC office staff
  - the overall policy & priority function to a small executive group [? the Conference Chair and Deputy, with two elected others++, along with GPC Chair and Deputy],
- Limit the term of office for ++ above to 3 years so ensuring 'freshness' and actively improving participation by the general membership.
- Encourage submission of motions throughout the year, rather than on the bolus principle.
- Programme for the earlier submission of motions for collation & web site publication of a preliminary agenda so as to allow LMCs to identify their main agenda priorities.
- Reduce the allocated time spent on established, accepted and self evident motions
- Formalise time for 'oral central briefings'.
- More radical 'compositing' of motions as indicated by LMC priorities.
- There should be a defined period of 'protected time' reserved for motions balloted for at the start of business.

\*\*\* Note the availability of the more informative & business like full GPC Annual Report is commendable as this is central to the GPC's account of its performance to the profession.