



## Consortium of Local Medical Committees

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### The Primary Care Network DES 2020

The LMCs in Lancashire and Cumbria are receiving a number of queries in relation to signing up to this year's PCN DES. This has been complicated by the confusion over the sign-up process / timetable and a strongly worded letter from our colleagues in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire LMCs. We feel it is necessary, therefore, for the 5 LMCs in Lancashire and Cumbria to set out our position.

As all practices know the build-up to the PCN DES for the second year (from April 2020) has had something of a chequered history. The disastrous consultation over the Christmas period over a far too mechanistic and overly managed set of Service Specifications got the response from the profession that it deserved. NHSE listened to this response and there was agreement between the BMA's national negotiating team and NHSE to a much more flexible and realistic reduced set of Service Specifications.

This new draft agreement was put to the full GPC meeting in February (comprising all regional GPC representatives and committee leads – around 80 individuals in all) and was accepted in full with a 70% majority. On this basis, in line with any national negotiating arrangements, it became a done deal between NHSE and BMA. At our local Annual LMC Conference (the day after the agreement) and at the two roadshows where GPC Execs went through the new PCN DES with local GPs there was a broad welcome and sense of a positive outcome to the negotiations.

At the January GPC meeting, in the light of the "Christmas Consultation" and before the new deal was agreed, there had been a call for a Special Conference of LMCs. Due to procedural issues this Special Conference could not be cancelled, despite a new deal being agreed. Many of us could not see the reason for this Special Conference and it was confirmed to us that the Contract Deal was now agreed and could not be overturned. All that could be done at the Special Conference was make representations about the following years negotiations. On this basis none of the Chairs, Vice Chairs or members of any of the 5 LMCs in Lancashire & Cumbria chose to attend on 11<sup>th</sup> March. You will remember it was at the time when COVID 19 was gathering pace and the thought of travelling on crowded trains and assembling in a crowded hall was thought to be unwise. We did, however, submit a motion to Conference as follows:

*That conference:*

- (i) fully supports the GPC England negotiating team in its endeavours to secure agreements with NHSE to protect, preserve and enhance general practice*
- (ii) believes that the Contract Agreement for 20 / 21 represents a positive step forward in supporting the partnership model within a PCN environment*
- (iii) believes that the agreement allows PCNs to develop at a pace commensurate with resources and without over prescriptive and arbitrary targets*
- (iv) accepts the apologies for non-attendance at this special conference from Lancashire & Cumbria LMC members in view of the need to maintain clinical cover in an area with severe workforce shortages. [Supported by Central Lancashire, Cumbria, Lancashire Coastal, Lancashire Pennine and Morecambe Bay LMCs]*

This motion was never put and it appeared to us that the Special Conference was dominated by a group of LMCs that were motivated to attend and were fundamentally against PCNs. I do not believe that this Special Conference represents the majority view in LMCs nationally and some resolutions reached went against what had been agreed by GPC with a large majority a month earlier.

Since then the situation has changed significantly as the response to COVID 19 has taken over everything. The PCN DES has been simplified to focus entirely on COVID and to provide resources to practices to enable them to rise to the challenge.

The formal position of GPC, as late as April this year, is contained in the PCN Handbook as follows:

*The PCN DES commenced on 1 April 2020. The climate and the pressures have changed significantly since the original specifications were agreed and in response to this GPC England has produced this guidance to support practices to work together.*

***We encourage all practices to take part in the DES to provide structure in the national effort to deal with COVID-19.***

#### ***Service specifications***

*NHSE/I have indicated that some of the service specifications have been postponed for a period of time. Realistically general practice will not be in a place to work on these fully this year.*

*We suggest that practices, working together where possible, focus on providing good care for patients whilst acknowledging that COVID-19 is going to take up most of our workforce and*

The Lancashire and Cumbria LMCs fully endorse this position – it is reasonable, practical and allows practices to access money that they would otherwise be unable to access.

We note that several GPs have seen a statement from Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire LMCs that is fundamentally opposed to the DES and advising practices not to sign it. Whilst these three LMCs can express their opinion and there may be local factors at play there, it is not in line with national GPC Policy and one with which we in Lancashire and Cumbria fundamentally disagree. Without going line by line through the letter we take a completely opposite view on some key points:

- We believe the creation of PCNs does preserve the partnership model and secures the future of the GMS Contract
- It offers a vehicle for “primary care at scale” in those circumstances where it makes sense to provide services at a level above individual practices but maintained within a collaborative arrangement where practices remain in charge
- It puts general practice centre stage in controlling the integration of community and primary care services.
- It pushes away any attempts to make the service a salaried service or have a single, at scale provider for primary care.
- It offers significant investment and extra staff to address the serious workforce shortages in general practice
- The relationship between the core contract and the PCN DES is very clear – the GMS Contract can survive without the DES but not vice versa.
- There are other parts of the BBOLMC letter that are highly contentious and offer a very subjective view. I am happy to elaborate on any particular points as a separate communication.

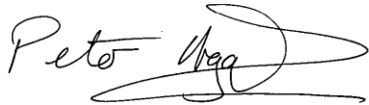
***Lancashire & Cumbria Consortium of LMCs***

*Serving practices in Central, Coastal & Pennine Lancashire, Morecambe Bay and Cumbria*

In summary, although it is an individual practice decision, we would advise signing up to the PCN DES for this year to help access funding and additional workforce. Practices can make a new decision next year when signing up to the DES for 21/22.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Higgins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

PETER HIGGINS

Chief Executive