

## Promoting NHS General Practice in Scotland

*Dr Andrew Cowie, GP (Tayside): "I believe [GP Week] was responsible for helping change the tide of opinion at Scottish Government from one dominated by tabloid views to one that helped them see GPs as partners in the future development of the health service."*

### Introduction

British Medical Association (BMA) Scotland has developed a long running campaign to promote general practice in Scotland.

Despite continued high levels of patient satisfaction, and the introduction of a new contract in 2004, general practice has received negative media coverage, largely relating to reports of increased earnings and the removal of GP responsibility for 24 hour care. This has affected politicians' perceptions of general practice.

In order to counteract these negative perceptions and demonstrate the value of general practice, BMA Scotland created a joint public affairs and public relations campaign to successfully launch the first ever 'GP Week' which ran between 7-14<sup>th</sup> February 2010. Underpinning this initiative was the publication of the BMA's new strategy for NHS General Practice - "*General Practice in Scotland: The Way Ahead*".

### Objectives

- To promote the role of general practice in communities across Scotland
- To launch the BMA's report, '*General Practice in Scotland: The Way Ahead*'
- To influence policy-making by gaining cross-party support for key recommendations within the report
- To generate positive media coverage on the work of general practice

### The campaign strategy

'GP Week' was a concept created by BMA Scotland and was developed in close conjunction with public affairs consultancy, Grayling, supported by the Royal College of General Practitioners (Scotland).

It was critical that 'GP Week' and the recommendations in *The Way Ahead* report struck at the heart of political discourse during that week in February. Rather than follow a typical parliamentary launch, the BMA's strategy focused on securing grassroots engagement from local GPs, using the media to drive political interest and creative approaches to direct engagement with ministers and MSPs.

### Implementation

#### *Grassroots engagement*

- Local GPs were encouraged to hold events on GP Week and to make contact with the local media and MSPs (GPs had already been hosting MSP visits organised by the BMA as part of the wider campaign).
- BMA facilitated activities by producing/distributing template letters and press releases which could be used locally.

#### *Media engagement*

- BMA Scotland trailed the publication of *The Way Ahead* in *Holyrood Magazine* to raise political awareness and interest.
- A press release was issued on 7<sup>th</sup> February to launch GP Week highlighting the impact that Scotland's growing population was having on general practice.
- A separate story given to the Scotsman (as media partner) focused on out of hours care.
- A press conference was organised to publish *The Way Ahead* on 9<sup>th</sup> February, supported by a news release. The Scottish Government and opposition parties formerly responded.

- On the 10<sup>th</sup> of February, a specially commissioned 'pull-out' for GP Week was published in *The Scotsman*. This was written by the BMA working with the newspaper's editorial team.

#### *Parliamentary engagement*

- An exhibition was arranged in the Parliament during GP Week to raise awareness of the issues and events taking place.
- The BMA launched a short film showing the day in the life of a GP which was sent to MSPs and posted on the BMA's Youtube channel. The film featured comment from politicians from each of the main parties and has received more than 1000 views online.
- A reception hosted by Richard Simpson MSP was held in the Scottish Parliament on 10<sup>th</sup> February and included a keynote speech by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, Nicola Sturgeon MSP.
- MSPs were invited to spend time talking to GPs from their region/constituency (who had invited them to attend). Photographs taken of individual MSPs with local GPs were sent to MSPs after the event securing some local publicity for both MSP and BMA.
- A parliamentary debate based on a motion 'celebrating NHS general practice' lodged by Richard Simpson MSP received extensive cross-party support.
- To inform the debate, the BMA distributed a briefing note summarising the key recommendations within the report. The debate included a number of favourable references to the BMA, as well as strong cross-party endorsement for *The Way Ahead*.

#### **Evaluation and measurement**

- Extensive coverage in the Scottish media was achieved throughout GP Week leading towards the parliamentary reception, including front page stories in the *Scottish Daily Mail*, *Scotsman* and BBC online.
- Key recommendations from the report have formed the basis for meetings with Scottish Government officials, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and NHS organisations (i.e. NHS24 and Scottish Ambulance Service).
- The parliamentary reception was attended by over one-fifth of all 129 MSPs which is an exceptionally high number.
- The Scottish Government has held 'roadshows' on primary care issues that have included discussions on key recommendations within the report.
- GP representatives and BMA staff have met with each party health spokesperson and the Scottish Parliament's Health Committee to discuss the report and drive a cross-party consensus.
- At a UK level, the BMA's General Practitioners Committee has developed a similar campaign and is currently consulting the public for their views on access and out of hours care.
- Internationally, GPs from Australia have met with BMA representatives to discuss *The Way Ahead* and Scottish primary care policy.

*Noel Dolan, Special Adviser to Nicola Sturgeon, Cabinet Secretary for Health & Wellbeing: "GP week was a very positive initiative and the BMA is to be congratulated for creating this opportunity to promote the very best of NHS general practice in Scotland. The BMA's report, The Way Ahead, also provided a constructive contribution to the debate on primary care health policy in Scotland."*

*Richard Simpson MSP: "The BMA's document "General Practice in Scotland: The Way Ahead—Final Report"...spells out a clear vision for the future of general practice."*

*Jackie Baillie MSP, Shadow Health Secretary: "I thought General Practice week was a great success!"*

#### **Ongoing activity**

- The recommendations in the report will form part of our discussions with the political parties as they develop their 2011 election manifestos.

**Budget**

- Total budget for all activity was £10,000.