

# Report of Secretary for Scotland to Guild Council Meeting 13/9/11

## Group Meetings

There have been no meetings since my last report to Council.

## In the Press

**9/7/2011** A proposal that funds could be diverted from the NHS to help pay for Scotland's crumbling roads appeared under plans drawn up ahead of a summit on how to tackle a £2.4 billion maintenance backlog. A working group set up by Transport Scotland was asked to consider whether health funding could be used to improve the condition of roads in order to achieve an "overall saving" to the NHS by cutting the expense of treating accident victims. But the Government agency removed all mention of the plans for diverting NHS funds from its website and said: "There are no plans to use NHS funding in this way, and this idea is not being considered."

**2/8/2011** Nicola Sturgeon has unveiled a £30 million action plan to improve the early detection of cancers. It has been estimated that more than 300 lives a year could be saved by earlier diagnosis. The fund will initially focus on breast, bowel and lung cancer, the three most common forms of cancer. Improvements will be made to screening programmes with an emphasis on raising awareness of early symptoms among the public and health practitioners. While survival rates in Scotland have improved, particularly over the past decade, the figures remain low when compared to the rest of Europe.

**2/8/2011** BMA Scotland has written to the Scottish Government urging Ministers to undertake a consultation on NHS pensions, following the announcement of proposed changes to the system in England and Wales. Dr Brian Keighley, chairman of the BMA in Scotland, noted it was usual practice for the NHS Superannuation Scheme (Scotland) to adopt the same provisions as the England and Wales scheme, adding: "The Scottish Government has publicly expressed its concerns about changes to public sector pensions and shares many of our concerns. Whilst we appreciate that the Scottish Government is constrained in relation to public sector pensions, we would hope that a Scottish consultation together with an appropriate response from the Scottish Government, would help to influence the approach of the UK Government on this issue."

**4/8/2011** Audit Scotland has published a report on Scotland's public finances, setting out some of the key risks and issues faced by public sector leaders and politicians. The report stresses the need for public bodies to focus long-term financial sustainability to secure the future of effective public services, and says that despite the Government's no compulsory redundancy policy, "workforce reductions are likely to be a significant source of savings". The document also calls for a renewed debate on benefits such as free prescriptions. Scotland's public sector budget in 2011/12 for running costs and day-to-day spending is £27.5 billion, a drop of 6 per cent or £1.7 billion in real terms from £29.2 billion in 2010/11. Public bodies have budgeted for this in 2011/12, but they need to make significant savings during the year and there is a risk they won't achieve this due to

cost pressures being greater than expected or unforeseen events. Public bodies are facing increasing pressures and demands, such as Scotland's ageing population, the effects of the recent recession, and the public sector's maintenance backlog. Meanwhile budgets will continue to drop; the planned 2014/15 budget of £25.9 billion will be 11 per cent, or £3.3 billion, smaller than in 2010/11. Pay restraint and reducing workforces are the most common approaches being taken by public bodies to reduce costs over the next few years. Many bodies have already reduced staff numbers through recruitment freezes and voluntary redundancy schemes, and further reductions are planned.

**25/8/2011** More than £10 million was spent last year giving Scottish NHS workers voluntary redundancy deals as part of plans to cut the workforce in healthcare. Labour yesterday published Freedom of Information documents which showed how the voluntary redundancy costs went up from £3.5m in 2009-10 to £10m in 2010-11, as health boards sought to cut spending on pay in advance of major spending slowdowns. The increase was largely brought about due to a major severance scheme in *NHS Lanarkshire* which persuaded 130 staff to leave during the year. A Scottish Government spokesman said most of the redundancies in *NHS Lanarkshire* were administrative staff and would not impact on patient care. He said: "Over the last 12 months we have seen NHS boards deliver a planned reduction in the NHS workforce and the number of acute beds, while at the same time increasing activity and improving quality. We now have the best waiting times performance and the lowest levels of healthcare associated infection on record. The latest overall figures for March show the number of staff employed has declined by 1.2 per cent compared with six months earlier, the equivalent to 1,855 full-time people leaving.

*NHS Grampian* gave voluntary redundancy to 31 members of staff at a cost of £2.3m, while *NHS Ayrshire and Arran* offered deals to 18 people. The cost was not disclosed. The figures on voluntary redundancy could be even higher as they do not include *NHS Lothian* or *NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde*.

**15/8/2011** A Freedom of Information request lodged by Conservative MSP Margaret Mitchell on costs of prescription wastage has been met with a variety of responses by health boards.

Commenting, Margaret Mitchell said that four NHS boards (*Fife, Forth Valley, Grampian* and *Tayside*) were unable to provide any information, others were able to provide estimates and only *NHS Western Isles* were able to provide definitive figures. She said: "Clearly is it difficult to pin down the full extent of the cost of prescription medicine wastage as people do not always return medicines to pharmacies for disposal. However, as the number of prescriptions dispensed increases, especially with the advent of universal free prescriptions in Scotland, it is essential that NHS boards are proactive in both trying to monitor the cost of prescription medicine waste."

**16/08/2011** *NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde* announced the transfer of both elderly rehab and outpatient services from *Lightburn Hospital* to *Glasgow Royal Infirmary* and *Stobhill Hospital*. The decision, which will result in the closure of *Lightburn Hospital*, has now been passed on to Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing & Cities Strategy, Nicola Sturgeon who is expected to make a decision within 10 weeks.

**16/08/2011** From the week beginning the 22nd August 2011, households in the *NHS Highland* area will receive "Health Check", the Board's first local newspaper. It is hoped that the eight page publication, which will be produced and distributed for a cost of 14p per household, will help to "ensure everyone has a chance to help shape the future of health services in the area". *NHS Highland* Chair, Garry Coutts commented: "It is really important that we let everyone know about the need for change but also for local people to have a say in the future of their health service. We know people love the NHS and are very concerned whenever they hear there are planned changes. We also know that with there being a lot less money around people are concerned this might result in damaging cuts. We know some people will say we should only spend money on front line services rather than producing a newspaper but we have an obligation to tell people what is happening in their health service."

**18/8/2011** The vast majority of doctors believe patient safety is compromised by the August intake of medical trainees, a survey has suggested. The latest intake of medical trainee doctors start their training posts in the NHS at the beginning of the month. The figures come in a study from the Society of Acute Medicine and the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. It found that 90% of doctors who responded said the changeover had a negative impact on patient safety. The report authors called for an urgent reform to the system to be examined by the UK and Scottish governments. On the same day trainees start, doctors already in training rotate into other positions. An estimated 50,000 doctors in the UK change over on the first Wednesday in August. The survey of just under 750 doctors throughout the UK, published in the journal *Clinical Medicine*, found:

- 93% believed the August changeover had a negative impact on patient care
- 90% believed the changeover had a negative impact on patient safety
- 58% believed the changeover had a negative impact on doctors' training

**31/8/2011** The scale of job losses in the NHS in Scotland has been revealed by new figures. More than 2,000 employees are set to leave this year, including job losses for almost 1,000 nurses. More than 1500 NHS posts were axed in Scotland between March and June this year, prompting claims that patient care is being placed in jeopardy. Nurses and midwives accounted for one in three job losses and the head of Scotland's nurses warned their shrinking workforce spells "bad news" for frontline services. NHS Scotland revealed an almost 1% drop in the number of nurses and midwives in Scotland's hospitals in the three months to June 30, from 66,425 to 65,856 – a total of 569 fewer posts. The figures came against an overall cut in NHS Scotland staff, excluding GPs, of 1589 during the three month period –including a 7.5% cut in senior management posts. It follows previous cuts in nursing and midwifery staff of more than 1200 between September 2009 and March 2011. A total of 525 administrative posts were axed – a fall of 1.9% – while 29 consultant posts were also lost, equivalent to 0.6% of the total consultant workforce.

**31/8/2011** *NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde* are running a campaign entitled "Know Who To Turn To" aimed at helping people ensure they access the correct services from the right professionals at the right time. This comes after *NHS Ayrshire & Arran* reported a record number of attendances at A&E departments during June and July, with 294 of them having to be re-directed on to a more appropriate NHS service. The health board has now launched a new campaign to minimise the number of inappropriate attendances at A&E. It recommends alternative services that can be used instead, such as community pharmacists, minor injuries clinics or NHS out-of-hours.

**31/8/2011** The cost of providing free care to the elderly in Scotland has risen by almost 140 per cent since 2003. New statistics released by the Scottish Government reveal that the policy now costs £426 million per year. The rise was mainly due to an increase in the number of elderly people in receipt of free personal care at home, which has risen 40% to 46,260. The flagship policy of free care for the elderly has succeeded in stemming the number of people going into residential homes, but the cost of caring for those in their homes has doubled, according to latest statistics. There are around a thousand fewer Scots in care homes for the elderly now than in 2003-04, vindicating the original vision of the Sutherland Report. The flip side to this has been a steady increase in the number of elderly people supported in their homes, according to a National Statistics publication, Free Personal and Nursing Care, Scotland, 2009-10. Health Secretary Nicola Sturgeon said: "These figures show that each year an increasing number of older people continue to benefit from free personal and nursing care. This reflects the Scottish Government's focus on more intensive support to frail older people at home or in a homely setting, as well as the shift in the balance of care towards providing care at home."

## **Unlicensed Medicines Review**

Work continues on the business case for a single site for the manufacture of unlicensed medicines in Scotland. Work has also started on the criteria for selection of a suitable site.

## **Other**

I have dealt with a number of member queries, one new membership and one new PII application.

Colin Rodden  
9.9.11