

GUILD OF HEALTHCARE PHARMACISTS-UNITE

Notes of the General Meeting held on 10th May 2008 at Chesford Grange Hotel Warwicks

The National Professional Committee (NPC) Chair, (formerly President) Richard Cattell, opened the meeting. He explained the format of the meeting and items to be discussed.

Presentation by Kevin Coyne

He then introduced Kevin Coyne, Head of Health who updated the meeting on union activities.

Kevin formally announced the retirement of the professional secretary in November and thanked her for her contribution to the Guild and the union.

Kevin also thanked David Miller for his work on the Pay Review Body submissions over the past 3 years.

He described how the union is trying to attract professionals and other groups to become members of Unite, the recognition by the Department of Health and the ability to meet with the Ministers and officials.

He described the campaigns to keep NHS and other services public and keep the public sector ethos. He feels that science in the NHS is not valued, so the NHS is losing highly trained professionals. He described privatisation as unnecessary: many companies are trying to make a profit out of the NHS.

Pay Review Body Submission: Kevin praised Dave Miller's submission. The proposal for a "golden handcuffs" style retention payment for pharmacists will be followed up and negotiated, but the real objective is to get a recruitment and retention premium for pharmacists. There was an obvious problem with the way the Department of Health interpreted the vacancy evidence collected. Unite will be following the procedures in the Agenda for Change handbook to achieve the premium, as pharmacists are noted in annex R of the handbook.

Pay: Kevin described the difficulties of the pay "negotiations" where Unison and the RCN had gone ahead to agree this without the other unions. It suited them to accept as it gave more to the lower paid bandings, the vast majority of their members. However, Kevin disagreed with addressing this through the pay rise: if there is a problem with the pay level for particular bandings this should be addressed by increasing the minimum of the band(s).

The pay deal was also a 3 year deal, but Unite does not consider that the offer was sufficient or provide sufficient safeguards against inflation in years 2 and 3. Unite was totally opposed to the deal and was also very concerned about the behaviour of Unison and the RCN in going it alone.

On-call: this is due to be discussed as the protection arrangements were due to run out later this year. It was anticipated that the protection would be extended until September 2009. In the meantime he wanted members to send information on on-call systems and views through the Guild.

Bill Brookes asked if the meeting could be assured that the professional secretary post would be replaced before the current postholder retires. Kevin responded, "yes".

Ron Pate flagged up a difficulty in getting regional officer support for 3 members in the West Midlands region. Kevin responded that he would take this up with the West Midlands. However he pointed out that there are differing views within the regions as to the level of support which can/should be offered by regional officers. There are now 72 officer involved in health. 32 had attended a recent training event. For the organisation locally to be robust there needs to be a union set-up within the workplace. If there are further problems these should be reported to Kevin.

Annual report

David Miller went through the sections of the report and asked for any comments.

Terms and conditions

He commented that trying to negotiate a recruitment and retention premium for pharmacists is a long term project, this being the third year in which the evidence submitted has been accepted.

Education and development

Ian Simpson raised the potential difficulty of funding of postgraduate education for pharmacists as the education funding body had ruled that funding would not be available for courses beyond masters level. Newly qualified pharmacists already have a masters degree, but unlike some other professions pharmacists were not exempted from this funding restriction. It was agreed that the NPC chair would send a copy of Anthony Smith's letter about this sent on behalf of the heads of schools of pharmacy, to Kevin.

Communications

There will be a new Guild web site later in the year.

Ron Pate requested that the results of the NPC elections should be reported in the annual report. This will be actioned.

Treasurer's report

Ron Pate queried whether the profits from the annual conferences had been received from Profile. It was confirmed that it is now in the Guild's bank account.

A short discussion took place on Guild Groups which do not meet any more. It was felt that if this was the case for many groups there should be a review of the purpose and functions of the groups.

International Committee

Tony West is now a member of the EAHP board

Special Interest Group (SIG) reports

Bill Brooks queried that there were no reports for two of the SIGs. This was confirmed: no report had been received.

Agenda for Change update

Dave Thornton, chair of terms and conditions committee, updated the meeting on issues which had arisen since the annual report was written.

On-call he described as a challenge, as the pharmacist emergency duty commitment can amount to 10% of the total salary of a junior pharmacist. A Unite on-call working group has been set up. There is variation in the way EDC is implemented in different Trusts. The working group needs information on the different systems: he requested that Trusts send information to him.

The Pay Review Body recommendations for a “golden handcuffs” payment will present something of a challenge to implement. It is still the Guild’s view that there is a serious recruitment/retention problem in the lower grades and that the recruitment and retention premium, removing the bottom 4 points of bands 6 and 7 is the way to address this. However, the Guild through Unite are willing to discuss the “golden handcuffs”.

Professional Leadership Body

The approach to the proposed transitional committee which was to be appointed to oversee the setting up of the leadership body was discussed.

Views expressed were supportive of getting involved, the method of involvement depending on the type of membership of the committee, representative of interested organisations or members there for their expertise, for example.

Professional Liability Insurance

The professional secretary described the new professional liability insurance (PLI) scheme to be introduced for all Unite health sector members. There was to be a £15 a year add on subscription to the union fees and is an extension of the existing scheme for nurses. The reasons for the scheme were to recruit and retain members as this would provide cover for pharmacists working on a “portfolio” basis, for example part time in both hospital and community and for those supplementary and independent prescribers who felt that they needed PLI as well as their union membership, as

guidance was not always clear on this point. A mailing was to be sent to members during May /June.

There was then a minutes silence in memory of Bill Brown, Herbert Grainger and Henry Layer who had died recently.

The chair thanked everyone for their attendance.

Jean Curtis
Professional Secretary
18.11.08