

ROYAL COLLEGE OF GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

RURAL PRACTICE STANDING GROUP (RPSG)

Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Group held in the Old Library, Royal College of General Practitioners, 14 Princes Gate, Hyde Park, London, SW7 1PU on Monday 17 March 2008.

Present: Dr Gordon Baird (in Chair till item 4)
Dr Malcolm Ward (Chair from item 5)
Dr Jane Randall-Smith
Dr Russell Walshaw
Dr Paul Kettle
Dr Iain Mungall

In attendance: Saqib Ahmad
Mike Whelan (part)

1. **Apologies and formal announcements**

Apologies were received from John Wynn-Jones, David Johnson, Aidan Eggleston, Martin Green, John Elder and James Moore.

2. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

Members suggested corrections to the draft minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2007. With these amendments made the minutes were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

3. **Matters Arising**

a) Patients as members of staff (Nov 07 minutes item 5)

Gordon Baird informed the meeting that he had fed-back the views of the Group to the GP who had made the inquiry about this issue.

b) Rural Practice Group response to the NHS Next Stage Review interim report (Nov 07 minutes item 6)

Saqib Ahmad reported that the Rural Practice Standing Group response had been sent to the RCGP Chair Steve Field who has forwarded this on behalf of the Group to Lord Darzi.

4. **Representation of Rural GPs within the RCGP**

Gordon Baird reported that his paper setting out options for better representation of rural GPs and, proposing the creation of a rural faculty within the RCGP, had been presented by Helen Herbert to the meeting of the Council Executive Committee in January. The CEC considered that improved representation of rural GPs within the RCGP should take place through the wider RCGP Faculty Review rather than be taken forward separately.

Gordon Baird and Malcolm Ward met with Steve Field (RCGP Chair), Colin Hunter (RCGP Honorary Treasurer) and Paul Newman (Director of Membership and Development) to discuss how representation of rural GPs could be taken forward

following on from the decisions taken by CEC. Gordon Baird had produced a short note of the meeting which had been sent to Colin Hunter and would also be sent to Paul Newman to check that it concurred with his understanding.

Action Saqib Ahmad

Gordon Baird outlined the outcomes of the meeting as he saw them, and expressed his disappointment at these:

1. There is no prospect of a rural and remote faculty.
2. There is a need to engage with the devolved councils; there have already been moves in this direction.
3. The College will not object to the rural practice standing group organising a structure in parallel with the College organisations.
4. The rural practice standing group will need to redefine its aims and objectives in the light of the above

Malcolm Ward said that, though disappointed by the above outcomes, it was important for the RPSG work to improve representation through the vehicle of the RCGP Faculty Review.

5. New Office Holders

Gordon Baird informed the Group that he was stepping down as Chair effective immediately. All in attendance warmly thanked Gordon for his leadership of the Rural Practice Standing Group over the period of his Chairmanship, and in particular his work to achieve better representation of rural GPs within the College. Paul Kettle proposed that Malcolm Ward take on the role of Chair, Malcolm accepted the nomination and was unanimously elected as Chair of the Group. Jane Randall-Smith reported that John Wynn-Jones, who was unable to attend, had informed her of his support for Malcolm Ward to become Chair

The RCGP website would be updated to reflect the change of Chair.

Action: Mayuri Patel

6. Policy and Strategy for the Rural Practice Standing Group

Faculty Review

Malcolm Ward reiterated a desire for the Group to input to the RCGP Faculty Review process. Saqib Ahmad would check if a formal input to the Faculty Review had been made; if not, the process for submissions would be identified and Malcolm Ward would provide this. Mike Whelan indicated that an update paper on the Faculty Review had been presented to March Council, this would be circulated to the Group

Action: Saqib Ahmad / Malcolm Ward

Gordon Baird suggested that the Group should use electronic technology such as listservers and forums to facilitate communication for rural GPs at a national and regional level.

Rural Practice Standing Group Terms of Reference (ToR)

Gordon Baird reported that a short ToR for the group had been produced about 3 years ago. The Group agreed that the ToR needed to be rewritten to reflect its current aims, membership and the devolved structures of the College.

It was agreed that there should be representation from Wales, Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and from regions of England. It was suggested that England could be divided for this purpose into 4 regions. The issue of representation from other

organisations such as RPAS and the GPC was raised and there was discussion about how the membership could logistically be organised within financial constraints.

Saqib Ahmad would seek advice from the College's new Nominations Committee on the rewriting of the RPSG ToR and report back to the Group. He would also identify information summarising the main RCGP Structure to circulate to the Group and information relating to the RPSG's current terms of reference (e.g. from minutes and aims and objectives on the website) to the Group.

Action: Malcolm Ward / Saqib Ahmad

Working with other Groups

Malcolm Ward expressed interest in working collaboratively with the other College groups. Joint working with the College's Health Inequalities Group, with a possible aim of producing an output on rural health inequalities, received support from the RPSG. Saqib Ahmad would send contact details for Nat Wright, Chair of the Health Inequalities Standing Group, to Malcolm Ward to facilitate this.

Action: Malcolm Ward / Saqib Ahmad

Rural Health Inequalities Paper

Jane Randall Smith and Iain Mungall agreed to collate a referenced summary paper of research on rural health inequalities for the next meeting in June. Jane said that John Wynn-Jones would be keen to help. Jane also said that the IRH has produced 5 fact sheets for the Commission of Rural Communities on rural health issues that could usefully contribute to this work.

Action: Iain Mungall / Jane Randall-Smith / John Wynn-Jones

GP Survey

The Group agreed that a survey of GPs should be undertaken to identify interest in rural and remote issues. Gordon Baird reported that such a survey could be achieved with minimal cost via internet applications such as "surveymonkey". Several options were discussed to take the survey forward:

- Emailing the entire College membership with a link to the survey
- Emailing rural GPs, identified using the DEFRA definition, with College membership and emailing them with a link to the survey.
- Using mailing lists of other organisations e.g. RPAS, to disseminate a survey.
- Use the yahoo group to facilitate the survey

Gordon Baird would draft a set of questions to circulate for comment to the Group and would test possible applications to use for the survey. Saqib Ahmad would check the practicality of these options with Paul Newman and Frances Cloyne, and report back to the Group.

Action: Saqib Ahmad / Malcolm Ward / Gordon Baird / RPSG

7. Membership

The Membership structure would be reviewed through the rewriting of the Group's ToR. Issues to address include:

- Appropriate representation from countries and English Regions.
- Appropriate representation from other groups, such as RPAS and GPC, and their status within the Group.
- Financial implications of size of membership
- Length and terms of office

8. Publications / Occasional Papers / Country Matters

Article for RCGP News

Saqib Ahmad informed Paul Kettle that the article he had written on rural practice had been submitted to the College's PR team for consideration. Paul said that he realised that the article would need editing and references to a rural faculty removed. Saqib Ahmad agreed to follow this up with the PR team and would ask them to contact Paul.

Action: Paul Kettle / Saqib Ahmad

Gordon Baird drew attention to an article he had written on the implementation of the Connecting for Health project which had been published in the February edition of the BJGP.

9. Reports from Members

NHS Next Stage Review

Russell Walshaw reported that, as he understood it, all PCTs had been instructed to commission a "Darzi centre" (primary care centre) within the next year. The Group was concerned that issues affecting rural communities would not be considered in this process.

Iain Mungall suggested that well informed patients empowered through formal patient groups taking such action as writing to PCT, SHA and local MPs was a good way to influence policy decisions. He reported that his practice had set up a website to raise concerns about PCT proposals and engage patients:

<http://www.friendsofbellinghamsurgery.org.uk/>

Other Issues

- Some members raised concerns about the Department of Health's stated intention of phasing out the Minimum Practice Income Guarantee (MPIG) payments and replace this with the Global Sum Formula. This could be a particular problem for rural and remote practices, as well as other disadvantaged areas; members indicated that a substantial amount of their practice incomes were generated via MPIG.
- Jane Randall-Smith informed the Group that a Welsh Affairs Select Committee had been set up to look at cross-border issues. She said that a ministerial report and Welsh rural health plan were due to be published within the year. She also highlighted the problem arising from patients registered in Welsh practices being referred to specialist services in Welsh cities when services in England are far closer; the situation is arising due to increased decoupling of the two healthcare systems.

10. Any other business

i) Rural Practice Conference – 25 June 2008

Jane Randall-Smith informed the Group that she had been working with Catti Moss to investigate holding a conference on rural healthcare on 25 June 2008; the aim was for this to be run jointly by the Institute of Rural Health (IRH) and the RCGP, with the possibility of other organisations also being involved.

It was agreed that the RPSG meeting scheduled to take place on 16 June 2008 would be cancelled, and that this meeting would instead be held at the Conference on 25 June. Jane would contact Sonia Joseph, the RCGP Business Development Manager to seek advice; she indicated that plans for the event were at an early stage: initial costings had been drawn up and a venue at Warwick University had been provisionally booked.

Possible items for the event:

- Martin Green has agreed to talk about the “rural campus”
- Iain Mungall suggested there should be discussion on how the NHS Next Stage Review being led by Lord Darzi would impact on rural communities.

It was suggested that presentations could be done in the morning with smaller group workshops held in the afternoon.

Members agreed that the yahoo group, College website, 7-days bulletin as well as channels used by other organisations could be used to promote the event. Malcolm Ward and Jane Randall-Smith would write to RCGP Chair Steve Field inviting him to attend and speak at the event.

Action: Jane-Randall-Smith / Saqib Ahmad / Mike Whelan

ii) Rural Practice Standing Group Minutes

The Minutes of the two meetings held in 2007 would be placed on the Group’s section on the College website. Members would feedback updates on their website profiles as necessary.

Action: Mayuri Patel / Saqib Ahmad / RPSG

11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the group is due to be held on 25 June 2008. at Warwick University. Details TBC.

NB: This meeting had originally been scheduled to take place on 16 June 2008 at the RCGP