



Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE1327](#)

Main Petitioner: Maria Murray on behalf of ASIRUS

Subject: Grid Reference Identification Project – Improving the management of emergency cases in rural areas

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to promote and support the use of the Grid Reference Identification Project (GRIP) and to encourage GPs to invite vulnerable rural patients to take part in this initiative.

Background

GRIP is a system which was developed by ASIRUS (Asthma Support in Rural Scotland). It is a package of information provided to the Scottish Ambulance Service to hasten the location of patients and therefore improve the management of emergency cases in rural areas. The information it contains includes the patient's name and contact details, brief details of their medical condition and allergies, their grid reference and any relevant information on access to their property. The package is aimed at those with existing medical conditions which increase their likelihood of requiring emergency services.

The service commenced in 1993 and is being used in Grampian, Tayside, Highlands and Islands, Argyll and Bute. The Scottish Ambulance Service uses the GRIP system where available, entering the patient's details onto its Emergency Medical Dispatch Centre database.

In order for the Ambulance Service to use the system, GRIP requires GPs to identify and invite relevant patients to sign up and provide the necessary information. Most GPs operate as independent contractors under a UK negotiated contract. GPs may consider this an additional service, in which case it may need to be negotiated into the GP contract on either a local or national basis.

Scottish Government Action

There has been no specific action by the Government on the issue raised by the petition, although there has been general scrutiny of the performance of the Scottish Ambulance Service in recent years, including a Parliamentary debate held on [22nd May 2008](#), later followed by a statement from the Cabinet Secretary to Parliament ([4th June 2008](#)).

Each year there are national negotiations on specific aspects of the GP contract, to which the Scottish Government contributes. There is also scope for changes to the contract locally and these changes are led by NHS Boards.

Scottish Parliament Action

The Health and Sport Committee has recently inquired into out-of-hours care in rural areas and published its [report](#) on 23 April 2010. The Committee heard evidence of problems with the availability and response times of ambulances in rural areas. The Chief Executive of the Ambulance Service reassured the Committee that consideration of how to enhance provision in remote and rural areas constituted a 'major part' of its work programme. However, the Committee concluded:

“Whilst the Committee notes the Scottish Ambulance Service’s stated commitment to service enhancement and its achievements in improved response times, the Committee is concerned that community groups continue to report grave problems with the availability of ambulances to deal with emergency situations.” ([Health & Sport Committee, 2010, Para 50](#))

The Committee linked these difficulties to the knock-on effect of the new GP contract and the ability of GPs to opt-out of providing care out-of-hours. The Committee also made a recommendation that NHS Boards should work to find innovative solutions to address problems with out-of-hours care in rural areas. The Scottish Government has not yet responded to the Committee’s report.

There has been no recent parliamentary scrutiny of the GP contract.

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