

Editorial

Peter Walsh, Chief Executive

As this editorial is written, the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government has just been announced. Time for some crystal-ball gazing! I suspect that by the time this is published there will still be many unanswered questions about what to expect as regards health policy, and patient safety and justice in particular.

The three main parties' manifestos were unsurprisingly light in any detail about their plans for this policy area. On patient safety, the Conservatives said they would:

- make performance of the NHS totally transparent by publishing information about the kind of results that healthcare providers are achieving, so there is no hiding place for failure;
- reduce box-ticking and process targets;
- fight hospital infections by providing more single rooms.

The Liberal Democrats said in connection with patient safety that they would:

- introduce a series of reforms to improve patient safety;
- make it illegal for a local Health Board (sic) to allow a doctor to work in the UK without passing robust language and competence tests;
- require hospitals (sic) to be open about mistakes and always tell patients if something has gone wrong.

These last two points were particularly pleasing to see from AvMA's point of view. AvMA have been campaigning for

changes in the regulation of overseas doctors and out-of-hours GP care as a result of our involvement in the Dr Ubani case (German out-of-hours GP case). AvMA has, of course, had a legal 'Duty of Candour' as its main campaign for some time. While we were gratified to see the commitment in the Liberal Democrat manifesto, one could have been forgiven for not getting over-excited about the prospects of seeing the implementation of their manifesto. The coalition puts that in a radically different light and we hope increases the prospects of seeing a Duty of Candour in healthcare sooner rather than later.

On access to justice, there was even less detail in the manifestos, but both Conservative and Liberal Democrats have had a lot to say over recent years as regards clinical negligence litigation, legal aid, and potential alternative compensation schemes. Both agreed with the principle of the NHS Redress Scheme during the passing of the NHS Redress Act, but both had their own ideas of doing it better. It will be interesting if they choose to re-visit this area. The fact that it would involve extra expenditure, at least in the short term, probably makes it unlikely. It will also be interesting to see how the new Government deals with the recommendations by Lord Chief Justice Jackson on civil litigation costs.

Lastly, both parties absolutely castigated Labour for not holding a full public inquiry into Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust, and gave absolute promises that they would do so. So it must happen. Mustn't it?