

PE1493/BB

Scottish Parliament Public Petition PE1493 on a Sunshine Act for Scotland

Letter from the petitioner, Dr Peter J. Gordon.

20th November 2015

Dear Members of the Petition Committee,

I thought that it might be helpful to give you a brief summary on matters relating to my petition.

The Scottish Government has commissioned the Scottish Health Council to undertake consultation with the public. This is underway with ten separate discussion groups with somewhere less than 100 participants overall.

As petitioner I met with the Scottish Health Council in June and was asked to provide a summary to help in preparing information to act as the basis for the discussion among the participants. I was asked by the Scottish Government if I wanted to review the information that they had compiled but was confident that the Scottish Government would provide a balanced summary including the evidence that had been carefully compiled for this petition.

Having now seen the “information” provided by the Scottish Government, that forms the basis of the consultations, I now feel that I was naïve to have been so trusting.

This petition would not have been raised, nor indeed considered by the committee, had it not been for the following evidence, evidence which has not been provided to the discussion groups:

1. Current systems for declaring financial interests are failing in Scotland. No board in NHS Scotland has properly complied with the Scottish Government Guidance on transparency issued more than 12 years ago.
2. The pharmaceutical industry, on average, spends twice as much on marketing activities as it does on innovation and developing new drugs. If healthcare workers are “educated” by those whose first loyalty is to shareholders then scientific impartiality may suffer. Each year healthcare workers have to ensure they have met professional requirements for continuing medical education. In at least two NHS Boards in Scotland, it is the case that medical education is entirely supported by sponsors such as the pharmaceutical industry.
3. At least forty separate SIGN Guidelines, all currently in operation, have no records of the financial interests of those tasked to draw up the guidelines. This is concerning as these guidelines are generally followed by doctors to inform prescribing decisions for a wide range of medical conditions.
4. A single, central register (rather than multiple failing registers) has been found in the USA and France to be relatively simple to set up and administer.

As petitioner my overwhelming concern is that by presenting unbalanced information the Scottish Government has arranged consultations which will lack in validity. One of the main themes of this petition is genuine transparency. I am therefore also disappointed to note that the authors of the information provided are not identified.

I realise that the consultation process is well under way but felt it important to present to the committee the significant concerns which I have.

Dr Peter J. Gordon