

# scotnet news

Issue One • February 2004

## **A New Start...**

Welcome to Issue One of our re-designed newsletter! I hope you like the new title, layout and style. Firstly, I would like to wish all our volunteers a very happy New Year. I am sure, like me, that you are looking forward to some new challenges in 2004.

Secondly, I would like to thank our previous Co-ordinator, Fiona Robertson, for all her hard work over the last three years. The Network would not be what it is today without her enthusiasm and commitment. Good luck to Fiona for the future!

Thirdly, I hope that we will be able to build on our current membership over the next few months. We intend to raise the profile of the Consumer Network in our communities in order to attract some new volunteers.

## **New Volunteers Needed!**

As our current members already know, we are looking for people (individuals or groups) with an interest in their local community. We cover a broad range of issues - from education to the environment, health to transport. We ask volunteers to help us with small research projects.

The time commitment is small, perhaps an hour or so every couple of months. Any expenses will be reimbursed. We publish Scotnet News quarterly to keep our members informed and also hold occasional meetings. There are no formal qualifications required and no barriers to eligibility:

- You don't have to be an expert on consumer matters - you do have to have an interest in local and national consumer affairs
- You don't have to be opinionated - you do have to have an opinion

- You don't have to be fit and active - you do have to have an active, open mind
- You don't have to be well educated and highly articulate - you do have to want to communicate with us and keep us informed!

If you would like to know more about the Consumer Network please do not hesitate to contact the Co-ordinator:

Consumer Network  
Scottish Consumer Council  
Royal Exchange House, 100 Queen Street  
Glasgow G1 3DN

Tel: 0141 227 6462 Fax: 0141 226 0731  
Minicom: 0141 226 8459

Website: [www.scotconsumer.org.uk](http://www.scotconsumer.org.uk)  
Email: [gmacgregor@scotconsumer.org.uk](mailto:gmacgregor@scotconsumer.org.uk)

## **SCC at the Scottish Parliament**

On 16 December, Martyn Evans, Director, and Liz Macdonald, Policy Manager, gave evidence to the Health Committee of the Scottish Parliament on the NHS Reform (Scotland) Bill which is currently going through parliament. SCC gave evidence at the same time as the Scottish Association of Health Councils, and the main interest of the MSPs on the committee was to hear our views on the proposal to abolish local health councils and replace them with a new national body, known as the Scottish Health Council.

SCC is in favour of this move, which we see as strengthening the powers of health councils to make sure that NHS bodies listen to the views of patients and members of the public, and to design services around patients' needs. We will be watching to see what the committee recommends after hearing evidence from a wide range of people, from both inside and outside the NHS.

## **Health Rights Information Scotland (HRIS)**

The Scottish Consumer Council has received funding from the Scottish Executive Health Department for two years from April 2003 to prepare a range of information products for patients. The project will focus on information about patients' rights, producing templates which can be used throughout the NHS in Scotland. The process of developing information will aim to involve patients and members of the public, as well as NHS staff.

HRIS will get input from patients, staff and the public in the process of putting information products together. This is one way to make sure that any information the project produces is not only accurate and up-to-date, but also accessible in terms of format, language and style. They will also be looking into whether there is a need to produce different versions of information for specific user groups such as carers/relatives, people with learning difficulties and children.

The project has its roots in plans to provide a replacement for the Patient's Charter. There is a need for clear guidance for patients on several topics. How the NHS protects the confidentiality of a patient's personal information is one example. Work is underway with research among patients, the public and NHS staff to find out what issues to include in a leaflet and poster about confidentiality, what the finished products should look like and how they should be written.

With the NHS complaints procedure set to change, guidance will also be produced for patients on how to use it and what to expect from it. Future areas of work include patient consent to examination and treatment, and possibly a local guide to NHS services. In addition, there is currently a review of whether there is a need for a new Code of Practice on Openness in the NHS in Scotland in the light of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act.

## SCC Staff News

Since the last issue of Network News there have been a few changes. As our members know, the new Network Co-ordinator is myself, Gill MacGregor. I have recently graduated from Strathclyde University with a Masters Degree in Information and Library Studies and I am looking forward to a new career at the Scottish Consumer Council. I will let members know as soon as possible what areas we will be covering over the coming months. In the meantime, please feel free to contact me at any time.

We are pleased to have a new full-time Researcher, Anna Ritchie, who joined us in May. This is a replacement for Susan Browne, who left to take up a research fellowship. Anna has recently completed a Masters Degree in Research at the University of Glasgow.

Two new members of staff have joined us over the summer to co-ordinate the Health Rights Information Scotland project. They are Samantha Brew, Project Development Officer and Rhona Keith, Project Support Officer. Welcome to them both.

We have a new part-time Administrator, Lorraine Urie, who arrived in November. Lorraine joins SCC after a short break to have a baby. Previously she worked at Rosehill Housing Co-operative. Welcome to Lorraine.

Morag Brown, who was Policy Manager covering Local Government, Education and Housing, has left to take up a post as Corporate Policy Officer with East Renfrewshire Council. Jennifer Wallace has been appointed to take Morag's place and took up this post on 12 January 2004. Jennifer was previously working as a Research Officer with Children in Scotland.

Congratulations to Fiona Barnes, Policy Support Officer, who has taken up a post with Patrick Harvie, Green Party MSP for Glasgow.

## Improving NHS Services for Disabled People – Can You Help?

The Disability Discrimination Act makes it unlawful for people who provide goods and services to discriminate against disabled people. From October 2004 the Act will require service providers to take reasonable steps to remove physical barriers which restrict access to goods and services. The NHS is the largest provider of services to the public in Scotland, and so has a huge task in making its services accessible to disabled people.

The Scottish Consumer Council is currently carrying out research to look for examples of things which make it easier for disabled people

to get the health services they need. We want to understand more about projects or working practices which have made a difference for disabled people.

If you, or your friends or relations know of any examples of things which have made it easier for disabled people to get the health services they need, then we would be interested to hear about it. If you would like a copy of the survey which we are sending out to disabled people, please contact Anna Ritchie at the SCC. Her phone number is 0141 227 6467 and her email address is [aritchie@scotconsumer.org.uk](mailto:aritchie@scotconsumer.org.uk)

## Volunteers Required for Health Research Public Interest Group

If you have ever been a patient and are interested in having your say to influence what health research should be carried out, a team based at Glasgow Caledonian University is seeking volunteers, from all over to Scotland, to form a Health Research Public Interest Group.

The Nursing Research Initiative for Scotland (NRIS), aims to include the views of as many patients, or people with experience of health services, as possible. The team are interested in what patients think is important and what should be researched in the health field in the future.

Dr Sue Kinn said: “*This is an ideal opportunity for members to become involved in the decision making process about the future of healthcare research in Scotland.*”

If you would like to become involved or for further information, contact:  
Sue Kinn at NRIS, Glasgow Caledonian University, Cowcaddens Road, Glasgow, G4 0BA.  
Telephone 0141 331 8100/03 or email – [s.kinn@cal.ac.uk](mailto:s.kinn@cal.ac.uk)

The team will pay travel, out of pocket and childcare expenses.

People’s voices are important – their views and ideas need to be heard. Becoming involved with the Health Research Public Interest Group will give volunteers a way of being able to influence what happens in the future. Members of the public who want to become involved with the research may be able to:

- influence the direction of future work
- advise on specific projects
- develop new research projects
- become involved in research
- disseminate research project results

## Modernising Dental Services in Scotland

The Scottish Executive Health Department has launched a major consultation on the future of dental services in Scotland. This has been prompted by various problems including the difficulty in many parts of Scotland of being able to register with a dentist for treatment under the NHS, growing dissatisfaction among dentists about the way they are paid, and the changing nature of the dental profession (for example, more women, more career breaks and dentists retiring early).

Consumers experience a range of problems in relation to dentists’ services. Even if they do have access to an NHS dentist, there is often confusion about what they are paying for, particularly when there is a mixture of NHS and private work, and there is a lack of information about how to complain about dentists’ services.

The consultation is asking very broad questions such as:

- What sort of dental services should be provided under the NHS?
- How should patients contribute to the cost of the service?
- How could more preventive work be encouraged?
- How should dentists be paid – for example, according to the number of patients treated, or by the actual treatments provided?

SCC will be responding, and we are hoping to focus on the needs of more disadvantaged consumers in Scotland. If anyone in the Network is interested in finding out more, look at the Scottish Executive website:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/health/mdssc-00.asp> or phone Gill/Liz for more details.

## House Selling News – Single Survey Pilot to be Carried Out

This project, which will be piloted in four areas of Scotland from April 2004, seeks to switch the responsibility for house surveys in the housing market from potential purchasers to the seller, and to provide more detailed information. The single survey pilots are a Scottish Executive initiative, supported by solicitors, estate agents, chartered surveyors and mortgage lenders. Our Director, Martyn Evans, is part of the Steering Group for the pilot, which will be managed by Communities Scotland, the Scottish Executive's housing and regeneration agency. They will last for a period of between eight months and a year, depending on the uptake.

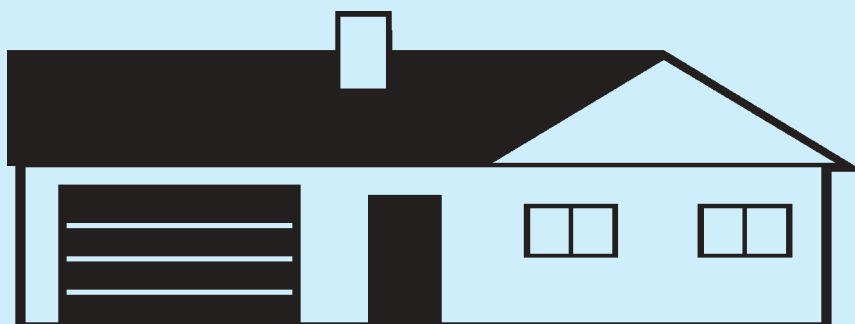
The pilot areas are Edinburgh North and Leith, Greater Dundee, Glasgow North and West and the area around and including Inverness. The pilot areas have been chosen to reflect a diversity of market conditions and features, e.g. prices and rates of increase, market activity, urban and rural properties and the extent to which solicitors and estate agents are active as selling agents.

It is likely that surveys will cost from £300, depending on the value of the property and the elements included. The survey will be made available to all potential purchasers and the cost will be met by the eventual successful purchaser. Currently, around 90% of all potential purchasers rely on a simple valuation when buying their home.

In the pilot, sellers will be encouraged to arrange and pay for a survey when a home goes on the market. The survey will provide a comprehensive guide to the condition of the property, together with a valuation. It will also contain important information on energy efficiency and a report on access for the disabled. The cost of the survey will be met initially by the seller, but will ultimately be met by the successful purchaser.

This compares with the established system in Scotland where the majority of people seeking to buy a home pay for a valuation only, not a survey, when they want to purchase a house. This means they have limited information on the property they are potentially purchasing. One in four recent buyers faced unexpected repair costs averaging around £3,700. A third of house purchasers in Scotland have to pay for multiple reports for different properties before they have a successful bid. This can cost around £100 each time.

It is expected that selling agents will ask all sellers in the target areas during the period to take part in the pilot. This will be a voluntary scheme but sellers will be encouraged to participate. A full evaluation of the pilot will be carried out. Ministers will then decide how to take the single survey forward.



## Feedback

Please send any news items and comments for inclusion in Scotnet News to:  
[gmacgregor@scotconsumer.org.uk](mailto:gmacgregor@scotconsumer.org.uk)

Scotnet News is available in large print and alternative formats on request.

**The views expressed in Scotnet News are not necessarily those of the Scottish Consumer Council unless specifically stated.**



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Consumer Council

Making all consumers matter

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