

Advice for Effective Meetings with Members of Parliament

Remember, when you walk in the door of your local member's office, he or she sees you as a potential vote. It is his or her job to listen to your concerns, and to take your message forward. Make it clear that you expect this of him or her and that you will follow up.

Getting the meeting

- Phone the electoral office until you speak with a human being
- Advise the administrative assistant that you need to make an appointment to see your MP
- It helps if you can be personable
- Tell them it is urgent. You will accept a cancellation if necessary. There is usually some wriggle room in the calendar: persistence and politeness will likely convert solid bookings to a meeting appointment within a few days if necessary.

Preparing for the meeting

- Send succinct, polite written correspondence regarding the contract issues ahead of the meeting. Ideally should be no longer than one page (example provided, Appendix A). Focus on impact of contract in current form and solution (going back to negotiating table). Outline MPs role in facilitating this process.
- Know the "quarry" – do your research (all available on Wiki)
- ☞ Political party
 - LNP (role in taking this to caucus, Health Minister, Premier)
 - ALP/Independent (potential ally)

- ☞ Any parliamentary portfolio or working party involvements
- ☞ Seat margin
 - Marginal seat is <56% two party preferred (more likely to listen, you are a potential vote in a swing seat)
- ☞ Who held the seat previously (historical context)
- ☞ Hospitals within the MP's electorate or serving electorate
 - Feel on the ground in those hospitals
 - Bring materials to leave with MP after the meeting
- ☞ A letter outlining your expectations following the meeting (dated the same day as meeting, example provided, Appendix B).
- ☞ Hard copies of any correspondence you have sent the MP
- ☞ A copy of the SMO contract (http://www.health.qld.gov.au/medical/medical-contracts/docs/smo_s1_contract.pdf) or VMO contract (<http://www.health.qld.gov.au/medical/medical-contracts/docs/vmo-sch1-contractemploy.pdf>)
- ☞ A copy of the issues list (http://amaq.com.au/icms_docs/178042_Contract_Issues_List_as_at_20_January_2014.pdf)

5 Essential Tips

All successful political campaigns have a few things in common. By following a few simple steps we can maximise our chances of success.

Tip One

ALWAYS lobby decision makers: that means, we need to talk to MPs who make up the majority in government.

Governments have the power to make decisions, oppositions do not. As tempting as it can be to seek out opposition support and support from independents we should target government MPs first. There are some strategic groups approaching the opposition who are on side with your campaign.

We are in control of our campaign, not politicians, and to do that we need to influence those who have the power to make decisions.

Tip Two

ALWAYS be polite, professional and courteous.

No matter how outrageous the decision a government has taken, or their attitude towards the people who are campaigning against them, you are never going to influence someone by appearing unprofessional, they'll use that as an excuse to write you off.

Tip Three

PRACTISE makes perfect.

It is understandable for people to be nervous or anxious before a meeting. In fact, it would be rare if people weren't a little nervous. The best way to overcome these nerves and have a successful meeting is to practice what you are going to say beforehand.

Discuss what issues different members of your group are best placed to cover so when the politician raises them you are ready.

Tip Four

TAKE notes.

It is very hard to remember everything that is said during a meeting. It is a good idea to assign someone the role of note-taker.

Tip Five

Discuss your upcoming meeting with your workmates and hear their experiences and anecdotes that you can convey to the politician in the meeting. You won't be able to pass most of them on but explain that their story might be the difference at a crucial point in the meeting.



Meeting Notes

For our campaign to be successful, it is important that everyone across the state is going in with the same message and asking for the same thing. We want to have a clear ask that is why we have developed the following meeting notes for people to follow.

Introduction

Briefly explain who you are and where you are from. Mention a common experience, attribute or value that you and the politician share without specifically stating that you have it in common. This allows the politician to establish that you are someone they are willing to at least hear out.

Confirm how much time you have for the meeting and lay out the issues you want to address during this time. It helps to assign one of your team as timekeeper who will wrap up discussion and move onto the next point when the time comes.

Concerns

Explain to MPs what members are concerned about:

People - Focus on aspects of our situation that the politician can understand. The anguish and uncertainty that Doctors face given the lack of information about the contracts and the uncertainty about what can happen under them.

The worry about losing fatigue provisions, being forced to work extra shifts, not being able to attract high quality trainees and being told to do something by medical managers that does not sit well with your view on service to your patients or the community. By giving a human dimension to the issue the politician cannot treat the meeting as merely an ideological debate.

Communities - Move onto the services that you deliver and the support that you require or provide. Explain what motivates you to be a Doctor and how your work helps Queenslanders. Try to be specific and give examples from your everyday. Discuss what is going to happen to the people who rely on the services you help deliver if Doctors leave. "I treat x kids a day" – "if all my colleagues leave what will I do?" "how will

our community be able to manage with no specialist medical staff or the uncertainty of medical staff being recruited from overseas for shorter time periods?"

Investment - The government is attempting to justify the contracts on the basis of unsound accounting practices and suggesting the old Private Practice arrangements are a sham etc. There are options to deal with this without contracts. Discuss how our government needs to invest for our future, support the public health system and how your work contributes to a stronger Queensland. Discuss how the Queensland Plan and the Blueprint for Better Health Care talks about this and you know Queenslanders expect an investment in Health care as a vital piece of the puzzle and that they expect Doctors to be engaged in this and not forced in to a position where you are without rights and treated very badly.

It would also help to remind them that they need to live up to their word, and people wanted to trust the

Our "asks" are:

We want Senior Medical Officers to be treated fairly. This will need a change in the current legislation. What we need to make sure we can maintain fairness and the ability to keep delivery the best healthcare for our patients and the community is:

- No ability for a unilateral change to conditions through Health Employment Directives or legislation that disadvantages employees.
- Binding, independent arbitration of disputes that is easy to access. Preferably a restoration of rights to be heard in the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission.
- No deterioration in conditions or remuneration, now or ever (regardless of KPIs / Tier 3).
- Restore our rights to access unfair dismissal actions.
- Ensure that SMOs cannot be forced to change our place of work or work patterns without consent.

Government but if they say one thing and do another, that makes it very difficult. People are looking to you for leadership and support. We supported you, that's why you are here, to do the right thing for us and our community.

Actions

Tell the MP exactly what concrete action you want them to take:

Push for Dignity - Ask your MP to represent you and your fellow members as constituents and lobby the relevant minister for information about the contracts. Request that they send you a copy of their correspondence and any reply.

Write to the Premier and Health Minister – Ask your MP to write a letter to the Premier and the Health Minister outlining that they have met with you and understand your concerns and ask him to reconsider the contracts, instead deliver a deal with Doctors that helps you continue to deliver quality services for communities. Again, ask your MP to send you a copy of the correspondence and any reply.

Photograph - Ask for a quick photo (their advisor or secretary should be able to assist) so you can show members that they have listened to your concerns. Politicians will rarely, if ever, decline a photo opportunity.

Invite to Workplace - Invite your MP to come to your workplace and hear the stories of your workmates so they can see what we will be losing if your fellow Doctors leave our Health service.

Likely Responses

It's worked elsewhere...

There are individual contracts in Victoria or the UK. Well, in Victoria they are reverting to a collective agreement and they have been spectacularly unsuccessful. In the NHS there is a critical shortage of senior doctors, particularly in Emergency. See here:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2220835/Top-consultant-We-haemorrhaging-doctors-A-amp-E-chaos.html>

And the following report: Stretched to the limit. This is based upon a survey of Emergency Medicine consultants in the UK which had a 70% response rate (1077 respondents who work in Emergency Departments). <http://bit.ly/19ccRIM>

In other industries where individual contracts have been introduced or used regularly the kind of restrictions on access to arbitration, no access to unfair dismissal provisions and the ability for the employer to unilaterally alter the contract with no further negotiation is certainly not the accepted practice.

It does not work elsewhere, we don't need to bring it in here.

Negotiations have occurred...

There have been over 30 negotiation meetings, the MPs may say. These "negotiations" only occurred after Together lodged a dispute conference and forced the issue.

Then there were meetings throughout December and January which Departmental representatives called a halt to before discussions were finished.

At least in these negotiations fundamental flaws such as allowances for Emergency Department staff were picked up and representatives forced the inclusion of the Grievance resolution policy.

However, critical issues were left unaddressed and with no good reasons provided, simply, that the Minister wanted things to happen now. We are asking you to see more time and fix the critical problems with these unfair contracts.

You are fiddling the books....

We are not corrupt. We are honest and we work hard. There may be some of our number who have done the wrong thing and the systems that have been put in place are clearly not working in those areas.

So fix the systems but do not punish the 99% of doctors who have chosen a career serving the needs of Queenslanders in the public hospital system. We have chosen to work in the public system to teach, to be there for all Queenslanders.

The Auditor General's report at no point suggests individual contracts and stripping our rights as a way to fix this issue.