

ASK THE EXPERTS

PBC, investments and 24-hour retirement

Q PBC CONSORTIUM
We were invited to join other practices in our area in a practice-based commissioning (PBC) consortium, but decided to plough our own furrow.

We are a large, innovative practice (12,000-plus patients) and believed the other practices would slow us down. Despite some early PBC successes generating significant savings, the PCT has not accepted our recent proposals for new PBC initiatives.

The consortium has now overtaken us and the PCT has offered the consortium – but not us – a real budget for prescribing and for referrals in certain specialties. Should we swallow our pride and ask to join?

How should we approach the consortium? The consortium practices are all smaller than ours and our initial refusal did upset them.

You should ask to join the consortium. I am sure that the future for PBC lies with commissioning for populations of 100,000 or more.

A 1998 King's Fund report on total purchasing pilot projects showed that managing the risk effectively with a budget covering non-elective care and

elective care needs a population of this size.

Get in touch with the consortium and be honest as to your practice's earlier reservation about joining it. Explain that you can see the member practices have proved their worth and dispelled fears about slowing down your practice.

Say that your practice is keen to join and move faster and further with them.

I suggest briefing your PCT as it is likely to be enthusiastic and could help broker the deal.

Dr David Jenner

Q STOCK MARKET BONDS
My bank is trying to persuade me to invest in a guaranteed stock market bond. Are these a good investment?

Guaranteed stock market bonds are structured investment products, aimed at providing capital growth and/or income, while offering full or partial protection of the original investment.

This protection is normally achieved by keeping most of your investment in 'safe haven' funds, such as deposit accounts, UK government stock – also called gilts – or corporate bonds (issued by companies to raise business expansion capital). A small percentage will be invested in

riskier investments in the hope of capital growth. Most guaranteed bonds tie up your cash for five years or more. You lose the bond's guarantee of receiving back your original investment if you withdraw funds early.

Despite providers advertising them as 'no risk', they have numerous drawbacks.

If the provider goes bust you will have to seek compensation from the Financial Services Compensation Scheme.

There are the substantial penalties for early surrender and a lack of transparency as these bonds become more complex. Dividends your money earns are not added or reinvested so growth is often capped.

If the credit crunch lasts less than five years (which is likely), putting half your money in a good savings account and half in a shares-based individual savings account (ISA), may provide a much better return than possibly zero growth from a guaranteed bond.

Remember though that investments in shares can fall and the income is not guaranteed.

Liz Willis

Q 24-HOUR RETIREMENT
I know that for the first month after taking 24-hour retirement I can only work 16 hours a week for the NHS. Is it OK to work 32 hours a week for two weeks and take two weeks' unpaid leave so I average 16 hours a week?

NHS Pensions confirms that

THE EXPERTS

Email questions or phone our experts...

**NHS RULES**

Dr Tim Kimber is a Littlehampton GP and deputy chairman of West Sussex LMC.
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**INVESTMENT PLANNING**

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**PARTNERSHIP**

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**LEGAL**

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**PREMISES**

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**PENSIONS AND FINANCE**

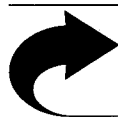
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**ACCOUNTANCY AND TAXATION**

Jenny Stone is a partner at Ramsay Brown & Partners.
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**COMMISSIONING, TENDERING, GP CONTRACTS**

Dr David Jenner is a Devon GP and the NHS Alliance's lead on practice-based commissioning.
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Ask your questions online

www.healthcarerepublic.com/experts

PLEASE NOTE

Please ask for 'GP Ask the Experts'. You may be asked to book a full consultation if your request is time-consuming or difficult. Our specialists retain the right to refuse advice. The information in the Ask the Experts list is for information purposes only. The expert advice is intended to provide general guidance only. It should not be relied upon by readers, who should seek further professional advice. No legal responsibility can be accepted by GP for the experts' answers.

averaging does not apply. This means that the aggregate of all NHS jobs during the first month must not exceed 16 hours per week. So if you have a GP post and a hospital post, the total hours worked across both positions must not exceed 16 hours per week.

Kevin Quinn