

A legacy to be proud of

As the AMII chair comes up for election next month, Stephanie Spicer talks to outgoing chairman Mike Izzard on his tenure and the tasks ahead

With an election approaching it is time for all good men and women to consider what lies ahead for the future of the marketplace. The private medical insurance market place that is.

The Association of Medical Insurance Intermediaries (AMII) elects a new chairman every two years. That time is fast approaching; in April the existing post holder Mike Izzard will step aside for the latest incumbent.

As Izzard approaches the end of his tenure as chairman of AMII he will no doubt be hoping to leave a two-fold legacy: to have established the AMII module qualification in association with the Chartered Insurance Institute (CII); and to have established the committee which may in the future settle the contentious issue of claims transparency.

Izzard has worked through his two years as chairman to engage insurers with the Association. A measure of his success can be seen in the presence of all the major insurers at AMII's conference, its various AGMs and on the AMII Broker/Insurance committee. Some of Izzard's critics have claimed he goes too far to build relationships with the insurance companies, but Izzard is confident his approach is the right one.

"Getting the insurance companies on board and working with the Association is crucial to an open and fair dialogue. It can only work in the favour of the health insurance intermediary (of whatever size) and the client," he says.

RAISED EYEBROWS

Some have also raised an eyebrow at Izzard's efforts to ensure a closer working relationship with the British Insurance Brokers Association (Biba). But again Izzard is unapologetic.

"It is right we all work together for the common aim of promoting private medical insurance and the needs of clients for the best independent and impartial advice. But be under no illusion that AMII has a very unique place in the market, which Biba can never compete with, for specialist health intermediaries or to their clients."

Izzard is bullish when it comes to highlighting what AMII stands for.

"It is perhaps time some AMII members, and some non-members for whom the AMII door is always open, to recognise some of AMII's unique selling points: it is the specialist association for PMI, continually driving for increased professional standards

and striving to get the industry to work together, both intermediaries and insurers.

"AMII does work closely with Biba, where appropriate for the benefit of our members but will remain fiercely independent. AMII understands a very specialist sector whereas Biba represents the whole for the general insurance market."

However, he says it was in his manifesto when starting as AMII chairman that he wanted closer dialogue with the FSA and that he hoped alongside Biba and Group Risk Development (GRiD) a united front could be achieved.

"From a regulation point of view, there is pretty common ground between a health insurance intermediary, general broker and IFA," says Izzard. "As a group of professional bodies we could on behalf of all our members actually set the agenda and formulate the agenda for the FSA as to what consumers need rather than react to what the FSA stipulates."

To this end he has worked to have good relations and open dialogue with the FSA, Biba and GRiD.

The out-going chair says there are challenging times ahead for health insurance intermediaries. "Brokers and clients are not out of the woods as regards premium costs," Izzard warns: "Insurers are more risk averse as they look to revitalise their balance sheets and get themselves ready for an increase in claims. The latter is an inevitable consequence of a recession as some policy holders panic claim, either because they are afraid or know

they will be losing their PMI cover or because they have lost jobs so actually have the time to get the non urgent treatment they have been putting off.

"The role of the health insurance intermediary in adding real value to a client's protection cover is more acute now than ever before. They must work to educate their clients as to what cover and treatment they can get in the future and what it will cost them."

Izzard is keen to emphasise the achievements of the Association, on his watch and that of previous chairmen. These include achieving a high industry profile and recognition by media, regulators, intermediary sector, insurers and a growing presence with consumers.

THORNY ISSUES

There are still opportunities and challenges ahead for the next Chairman, Izzard says, in: "Continuing to bring the industry together to discuss thorny issues such as claims transparency. There is an opportunity to expand here on what has actually been achieved. The discussions may have been a little early for some insurers and it is all too easy for outsiders to knock but it will take time and significant progress has been made to date. I am convinced in the future further meetings will take place."

All AMII chairmen are also working health insurance intermediaries. Izzard is also founder and chairman of Premier Choice Healthcare which is based in Towcester, Northamptonshire. So life after AMII (he retires from the Committee also at the end of April) will still be pretty busy. Will he miss it?

"I have thoroughly enjoyed my tenure but it is time consuming. I have a good strong team back at Premier Choice Healthcare who are more than capable of keeping things going when I am absent on AMII work, but nevertheless I need to be informed of all that is going on. So not having the AMII work to distract me will be a help."

But his belief in AMII will not leave the Association with him. "AMII is considerable value for money for its members," he says, "It is totally focused on its specialist sector and it is here purely for the membership."

Something that could be said about Izzard and his clients – to whom he will now be giving his undivided attention. □

