

Contacting your Member of Parliament

Members of Parliament (MPs) are elected to represent the interests of their constituents (people living in the area that they cover, like you) in Parliament and can be an important vehicle for influencing local healthcare policies and practices and decision-makers. Involving your MP in the ACSMA campaign is a great way to publicise the issues around anticoagulation services, warfarin and self-monitoring on both a local and national level.

You can ask your member of parliament to add his or her support to the ACSMA campaign. If you are based in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, please get in touch for details of how you can contact your local parliamentary representative or legislative assembly member.

How do I find out who my MP is?

You will need to know your postcode.

- Visit <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/>
- Telephone the House of Commons Information Office on 0207 7219 4272

What can an MP do to further ACSMA's campaign?

In Parliament, an MP can:

- Ask questions in the House of Commons.
- Write to a Government Minister.
- Sign an Early Day Motion (EDM). These are a way that MPs can show their support for an issue. Please email info@acsma.org.uk to find out if there are any relevant EDMs that your MP could add his or her name to.
- Join a cross-party All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) to pledge his or her support and to learn more about the issues. Currently, there are registered APPGs in the Westminster Parliament for Atrial Fibrillation, Heart Disease and Thrombosis.

In your local area, an MP can:

- Attend a meeting or event but, due to busy diaries, you'll have to ask MP if he or she can attend quite far in advance.
- Relay your concerns and the aims of ACSMA to local organisations, such as the local authority, HealthWatch or Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).
- Visit a local service, like an anticoagulation service and/or centre, or a branch event to learn more about living on warfarin.

How do I contact my MP?

Sending a short, personalised letter to your MP can be a really effective way of drawing their attention to an issue. We have drafted a template that you may find useful; it is available on the ACSMA website or as part of this toolkit.

You can find out how to contact your MP by visiting: <http://www.parliament.uk/about/contacting/mp/>

What should I do and not do when writing a letter?

Do:

- Stick to one issue.
- Keep it short.
- Include a personal story, if possible.
- Give an instruction to the MP, asking him or her to do something on your behalf - for example write to a minister, Clinical Commissioning Group or local authority.

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- Ask for a reply.
- Use bullet points to highlight your argument.
- Send a copy of your letter to ACSMA, so that we can follow-up on your behalf, if necessary.

Don't:

- Write to other MPs, just your own. Only your MP can help you with local campaigning, as MPs do not take up issues on behalf of people who aren't their constituents.
- Forget to include your name and full address.
- Use abusive language.
- Turn your letter into an essay.
- Meander from topic to topic. Remember, there is a template letter for your use in the toolkit.

Meeting your MP

Visit your MP during a constituency surgery – which is a drop-in session that MPs hold so local people can raise issues with them. It will give you a chance to explain how living with anticoagulants, such as warfarin, affects you, your family and your life.

How do I organise a visit to my MP?

1) *Give your MP's office a call*

Phone the House of Commons switchboard on 020 7219 3000 and ask for your MP by name. If you do not know their name, then phone the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272.

You may also contact your MP through the local constituency office. Addresses and contact numbers will be listed in local libraries, town halls, on an MP's personal website or through the House of Commons Information Office.

Ask the person you speak to when your MP's next surgery is: sometimes, these could be held on an open, first-come, first-served basis – in which case you'll need to get there early – or there may be an appointment system. If an appointment system is in operation, ask to book a slot and tell the person you speak to what particular topic or subject you'd like to discuss with your MP.

2) *Preparing to meet your MP*

It's critical to have a clear idea of what you want to talk to your MP about. What anticoagulant related issues are you particularly concerned about, and how will you be affected? ACSMA can support you by providing you with the latest briefings on key topics and campaign statistics. Send an email to: info@acsma.org.uk and let us know what you'd like to discuss.

Your MP won't expect you to be an expert: all you need to do is tell him or her your concerns about anticoagulation services in your area, about what it is like to have to take warfarin for life, about self-monitoring and your experiences, and ask them to do something to show their support, such as raise your concerns with the local Clinical Commissioning Group, or a government Minister.

3) *After the meeting*

You could follow the meeting up with a letter thanking your MP for his or her time, confirming what you talked about and what action he or she agreed to take. If the MP agreed to do something on your behalf, you can always follow up a few weeks later to see what progress has been made.

Finally, please share your correspondence with ACSMA and make sure you let us know how you've got on!