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Providing more opportunities for members

One thing I am very keen to see during the term of my Presidency is more direct involvement from the 'grass roots' of AMA membership. This was a big part of the motivation for the establishment of the AMA (NSW) Election Network that operated during the Federal election campaign.

We hope to build on the successes of the Election Network and get more members involved in the lead-up to March 2011.

It was pleasing to see more than 200 doctors join this network and by doing so playing a part in the democratic process. A wise man once said democracy may not be much of a system but it's the best system we've got. It's always tempting to think there's not much point in getting involved, especially in this age of poll-driven (rather than policy-driven) politicians but in my view that's a cop-out. The medical profession will always be a respected voice in our community and I believe it is important that as doctors we get involved in the democratic process. Two hundred actively involved doctors is a good start but eight thousand involved AMA members would make a significant difference to any campaign.

Election network members were provided with email updates about the progress of the campaign including weekly insights from Essential Research polling data. They also received detailed information about their own electorates and suggested pro-forma emails to send to candidates about health issues. Several small group meetings between local doctors and candidates were arranged and proved to be a great opportunity for face-to-face discussion (recognising the tendency for politicians to stay "on message" no matter how informal the context).

All this required a great deal of work on the part of the AMA (NSW) office and my particular thanks go to Kimberley

Darby for organising the meetings with candidates and Lachlan Jones for starting work on the Monday and getting the first Election Network email out on the Tuesday.

The Election Network no doubt played a relatively small part in influencing the views of NSW candidates but it did give our members the opportunity to be involved and is only the first step towards much greater involvement in future campaigns. The NSW election is next and we hope to build on the successes of the Election Network and get more members involved in the lead-up to March 2011.

One of the interesting things about the group of 200 doctors who were involved was there was a higher proportion of women than expected. It's hard to say why this was the case but perhaps because the time commitment was not great. Not many doctors at the best of times are able to find the time to add medico-political activities to their already full work and family lives. It may be that this type of campaigning which provides the opportunity to be involved but requires no more than receiving email updates and sending pro-forma emails to politicians is the type of family-friendly member involvement that enables more women to be active AMA members. I certainly hope this is the case and, if so, we will make every effort to provide more of these opportunities in the future.