

RCGP Briefing: Opposition Day Debate on a long-term strategy for the National Health Service

Overview

General practice is the cornerstone of the NHS, helping around 50 million people in England every year, carrying out 370 million consultations last year. Latest data from NHS Digital showed that **12,623,360** appointments were carried out by GPs in August 2022, an increase of **608,732** compared to August 2021. This means that GPs carried out over **5%** more appointments in a year despite a declining workforce.

At the same time, we are facing a situation with a falling number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) GPs looking after an increasing number of patients with ever more complex needs. As of August 2022, workforce statistics for general practice show:

- There were 27,515 fully qualified FTE GPs, a loss of 242 GPs since the start of the year. This figure also represents a 2.1% since June 2019 and a considerable 6.3% decrease since records began in 2015.
- The number of patients signed up to a GP practice has increased by 9% since 2015. In August 2022, each GP was looking after 2,248 patients on average, compared to 1,938 in 2015 - a 16% increase.

A recent RCGP survey paints a worrying picture of a service in crisis. 1,262 GPs responded to our survey between 3 March and 4 April 2022. The survey showed that:

- **42% of GPs say that they are planning to quit the profession in the next five years**
- **65% of GPs say that patient safety is being compromised due to appointments being too short**
- **68% of GPs say they don't have enough time to adequately assess and treat patients during appointments**

Years of under-investment in general practice and the chronic shortage of GPs and other members of the practice team means that without urgent action from politicians and NHS decision makers, the ability of general practice to meet patients' needs is in jeopardy. Targets to deliver more GPs continue to be drastically missed, and we simply do not have enough GPs to meet the needs of a growing and ageing population, with increasingly complex needs, on top of managing the fallout from the pandemic.

To ensure GP workload is sustainable, we must have the right staffing levels. This in turn, will help reduce stress and burnout, as well as increase retention rates and job satisfaction. **This is why the College is urgently calling on the Government to devise and implement a new recruitment and retention strategy that goes beyond the promise of 6,000 more GPs pledged in its 2019 election manifesto, as well as funding for general practice to return to 11% of the total NHS spend, more investment in our IT systems and premises, and steps to cut bureaucracy so that GPs can spend more time delivering care to our patients.**

What do we want

The RCGP are calling on politicians and decision makers with responsibility for the NHS in England to urgently commit to a bold new plan to provide GPs and patients with the support that they need.

As outlined in our campaign - [Fit for the future: a new plan for GPs and their patients](#) - we are calling for:

- **A new recruitment and retention strategy** that allows us to go beyond the target of 6000 more GPs, backed by a £150 million annual GP retention fund, increasing the number of GP training places by at least 10% year on year, and changes to the current visa rules to make it easier for international GP trainees to stay and work in the UK
- **An NHS wide campaign to free up GPs to spend more time with patients by cutting unnecessary workload and bureaucracy**, including through a review of contractual requirements and improving coordination between primary and secondary care
- Improving patients' experience of accessing care by investing in a new suite of IT products and support for practices, **making it easier for patients to choose to see the same GP or the next available member of the team**
- **Allocate a bigger share of the NHS budget to general practice** to return funding to 11% of total health spend - with £1 billion additional investment in GP premises, more funding for practices serving deprived communities, and extra money for primary care networks to provide preventative care and promote population health

If fully implemented, we believe these changes would mean:

- **Every patient can quickly get the appointment** that they need whether it is face-to-face, on the phone or via video
- Patients who wish to can book **an appointment with a clinician they know and who knows them**
- **Longer GP consultations** are available for patients who need them
- **GPs are able to play a key role in supporting community** initiatives, supporting well-being and helping people lead healthier lives GPs are working hard to make this vision for our patients a reality, we now need the government to provide GPs and their teams the support they need.

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Key Statistics

General

- General practice is the cornerstone of the NHS, helping around 50 million people in England every year, carrying out 370 million consultations last year (2021) - that's up 18.5% from 2019.
- 80% of GPs expect working in general practice to get worse over the next few years, compared to only 6% who expect it to get better. (RCGP Tracking Survey 2021-22)

GP Workforce

- Despite an agreement from Government that we need 6,000 extra GPs the number of FTE fully qualified GPs has fallen by 5% between September 2015 and 2021 whilst the population is 4% larger and health problems are getting more complex.
- There were 45 fully qualified FTE GPs per 100,000 patients in April 2022 compared to 52 in September 2015, when records began. This means that on average, GPs are currently looking after 2,056 patients, which is more than 10% more patients than in 2015.
- 42% of GPs say that they are planning to quit the profession in the next five years.

GP Workload

- On average, as of July 2022, GPs look after 2,247 patients - 16% more patients than in 2015.
- Between 2019-21, the number of clinical administration tasks delivered by GPs in England rose by 28%, up to 107 million in 2021.
- 68% of GPs say they don't have enough time to adequately assess and treat patients during appointments. (RCGP Tracking Survey 2021-22)
- 64% of GPs say they don't have enough time during appointments to build the patient relationships they need to deliver quality care. (RCGP Tracking Survey 2021-22)
- 65% of GPs say that patient safety is being compromised due to appointments being too short. (RCGP Tracking Survey 2021-22)
- 75% of GPs said that encouraging specialists to refer patients to other specialists themselves where appropriate rather asking GPs to re-refer them would make a significant difference to GP workloads.
- It is impossible for most GPs to manage the workload required in the time allocated, meaning on average they work 10 hours more a week than their contracted hours.

Multi-Disciplinary Teams in General Practice/Additional Roles

- Over half of GPs (57%) surveyed in our annual tracking survey said that their practice does not have access to the support and guidance to effectively integrate the new staff roles.
- 74% of respondents to our survey said that their practice does not have sufficient physical space necessary to accommodate new staff.