Why we need a ‘new deal’ for general practice

General practice is under threat

With 90% of patient contacts in the NHS conducted by GPs and practice nurses, general practice is at the heart of the health service – but due to plummeting levels of resource and increasing patient demand it is now on the brink of collapse.

During 2014/15, despite declining levels of investment, general practice teams in England will see around 370m patients, which equates to more than one million patients every working day.

When patients fall ill, or where they have one or more long-term conditions, the vast majority want to be treated at home, and would prefer not to go to hospital unless it is absolutely necessary.

Unlike many specialist doctors, GPs are able to provide ‘whole person care’, taking into account the full range of patients’ physical, psychological and social needs. GPs are often trusted members of their local community, getting to know people and their families over a long period of time.

Such is the key role that family doctors and their teams play in local communities that research, conducted on behalf of the RCGP, shows the vast majority of the public believe the Government should ensure there is sufficient investment in general practice so that most villages, towns and suburbs continue to have at least one GP surgery.

As the population grows in size and age, and increasing numbers of people develop multiple, complex long term conditions, general practice continues to deliver cost-effective, patient-centred care that allows people to be cared for in their local community, thereby taking pressure away from our overstretched hospitals.

But with rapidly declining levels of investment, increasing demand from patients, and a shortfall of between 3-4,000 GPs, general practice is now on the brink of collapse.

As a result, waiting times are growing, GPs are increasingly concerned that they may miss something serious in a patient and many family doctors are emigrating, changing speciality or retiring early.

To tackle this growing crisis, we urgently need a ‘new deal’ for general practice – so that family doctors can deliver shorter waiting times and more personalised care.

www.putpatientsfirst.rcgp.org.uk
Empowering general practice to transform patient care...

1. Increase investment in general practice

- With family doctors conducting 90% of patient contacts in the NHS, it is vital to increase investment in general practice in England from 8.5% of the NHS budget now to 11% by 2017, with the additional funding being spent exclusively on patient care.

2. Launch an action plan to increase the number of GPs

- Increase the GP workforce in England by 8,000 by the end of the next parliament.
- Increase the number of district nurses, community matrons and other health professionals who support local practices.
- With the number of medical graduates going into general practice training in decline, a scheme should urgently be launched to encourage medical graduates to go into general practice training, through both a promotional campaign and the introduction of appropriate financial and other incentives – such as paying off graduates’ student loans if they agree to train and practise in under-doctored or deprived areas.
- Reform the way in which the Performers List rules on returners are enforced, so that qualified GPs returning from extended periods of maternity leave, or practising medicine abroad, can join the workforce immediately.

3. Back general practice to provide care at scale

- Support practices to work together in federations, so that they can deliver a greater range of patient-centred healthcare services across their local areas.
At a time when general practice is teetering on the brink, do not impose further top-down organisational reforms – that will destabilise the NHS, divert millions of pounds away from patient care and distract GPs from caring for patients.

- Guarantee that no practice will close, due to cuts in the overall level of general practice funding, or arcane adjustments to general practice funding streams – such as the current withdrawal of the Minimum Practice Income Guarantee (MPIG) and the impending cuts to funding for practices under the Personal Medical Services contract.

- Task NHS England with collating and publishing information on GP workload at a national, Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and practice level to ensure that where general practice is unable to cope with high levels of demand practices are given targeted support.

- Review whether further red tape can be cut from the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) targets where there is not strong clinical evidence for retaining them.

- Do not impose artificial access targets for GPs – which are not adequately funded, could distort patient care, and cannot be delivered.

- Ensure patients can access appropriate robust information about their local practice in a transparent way, while avoiding the damaging naming and shaming of local practices based on crude ranking systems, such as those that have been suggested in the media for cancer referrals.

- Support a new programme of premises’ refurbishment to ensure that patients can consult with their GP, or other primary care professional, in decent surroundings, rather than in often crumbling buildings that commonly have not been improved or modernised for many years.

- Explore options for introducing new categories of staff to support GPs and practice nurses in their work, by picking up many of the administrative tasks, so that they can deliver better patient care.

www.putpatientsfirst.rcgp.org.uk
Threat to the future of patient-centred care

General practice in crisis

The ability of general practice to carry on delivering effective patient care in the community is now at risk.

While it conducts 90% of all patient contacts in the NHS, general practice in England is being given a rapidly diminishing share of the NHS budget – now receiving a record low proportion of just 8.5%.

This inadequate level of investment is set to get even worse, with research by Deloitte showing that if current trends continue, funding for general practice in England will fall by a further 17% to just 7.28% of the NHS budget by 2017.

As the population changes and demand for GP services soars, the nation is in desperate need of many more GPs. In fact, the RCGP estimates that in England alone an additional 8,000 family doctors are required to meet the explosion in patient demand by 2020.

As the general practice crisis deepens, increasing numbers of patients are inevitably seeking medical attention in secondary care – heaping further pressure on our hospitals.

The effect of the decline in investment levels, and the growing shortfall in GP numbers, means that the quality of patient care that can be offered by general practice is in decline. In fact, there is now a crisis enveloping the service.

Waiting times to see a GP are growing substantially, with RCGP analysis indicating that on more than 27m occasions patients will have to wait longer than a week to see their GP during 2014. According to research published by the RCGP, over a third of patients say that the length of time they have to wait to see their GP leaves them concerned about the impact on their health.

As patient demand soars, and resources plummet, general practice teams are buckling under the weight of ballooning workloads, with the majority of GPs now conducting between 40-60 patient consultations a day.

The unsustainable volume of work now being experienced by GPs has made the vast majority of them worry that they will miss something serious in a patient.

As the general practice crisis deepens, increasing numbers of patients are inevitably seeking medical attention in secondary care – heaping further pressure on our hospitals.

There has to be a better way.

The future of general practice?

- Waiting times to see a GP or practice nurse are soaring
- Funding for general practice is plummeting
- Up to 100 practices in the UK — serving 700,000 patients — face closure

Don’t let this be the future of general practice — join the campaign TODAY!

www.putpatientsfirst.rcgp.org.uk

RCGP campaign poster