

## RCGP Briefing: Autumn Statement 2023

November 2023

General practice is one of the most efficient parts of the NHS. In September, general practice delivered more than 32 million appointments, nearly 5 million more than the same month 2019. This is despite there being 950 fewer fully qualified GPs in England than in 2019.

The NHS Confederation has calculated that for every £1 invested in needy areas of primary care, at least £14 is delivered in productivity across the working community.

If you want to make the NHS more efficient you need to invest in primary and community care. There are however significant barriers to primary care reaching its full potential. This brief will look at three areas which we hope are addressed in the Autumn statement where we believe investment could make a big difference to patient care in general practice, and the NHS as a whole.

### Preparing for winter pressures and Acute Respiratory Hubs

Last winter the RCGP published a [report](#) that outlined the challenges general practice faces each winter, with 90% of general practice staff saying they were concerned or very concerned about their practice's ability to deliver the level of care that patients needed over winter.

It was an incredibly difficult winter for general practice, however, the establishment of Acute Respiratory Hubs (ARI) helped to ease some of the pressure on primary care services. These were separate hubs designed to provide care for patients with potential acute respiratory conditions who do not necessarily require hospital admission.

ARI hubs help to manage demand over winter by providing additional capacity to support primary and secondary care pressures and matching the needs of their population. The NHS evaluation of ARI hubs found that they can reduce pressure on ED attendance, free up capacity in general practice whilst improving same day access. They estimate that these hubs carried out 729,808 appointments and prevented 360,000 extra ARI ED attendances and 360,000 GP appointments.

This meant that for every £1 spend on Acute Respiratory Hubs it "saved the NHS" £4.11.

**We have heard that in many areas despite the success of the hubs last winter they are not being set up this winter as there is no protected funds for them.**

- **Question for the Minister:** *Given the success of Acute Respiratory Hubs in helping patients and reducing costs in other parts of the NHS has the Government ensured that the NHS increases or at least matches the expansion of these hubs this winter?*

## Investment in the primary care infrastructure

The RCGP's [survey](#) found that 40% of general practice staff members consider their general practice premises not fit for purpose, with some reporting having to fix leaking ceilings with cello tape.

Every patient should be able to access care in modern, safe, and fit for purpose buildings, but current general practice infrastructure is not adequate.

As well as fixing out of date buildings we need to build new space to accommodate the planned expansion to the general practice teams set out in the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan (LTWP). The LTWP commits to **increase the number of GPs in the NHS by 46% by 2036/37 and increase the number of trainees by 5,000 by 2027**. A recent RCGP survey however found that **84% of general practice staff said that a lack of physical space limits their practice's ability to take on GP trainees**. The LTWP admits that we will need to significantly expand the general practice estate to fit in these additional GPs but says that funding for estates is out of scope of the plan.

- **Question for the Minister:** *Does the Government agree that GP premises should be updated to ensure they meet patient need and provide the space needed to accommodate the expanding primary care staff teams?*

## Retention

NHS England has estimated that we need 12,000 more GPs by 2031/32 to meet patient needs. To ensure patients receive the best care possible, clear actions to recruit more trainee GPs and do more to keep GPs in the workforce for longer need to be taken.

The RCGP's manifesto calls for a new nationally funded retention programme to support tailored support for GPs at all stages of their career. Protecting learning time and making retention schemes more accessible will support GPs to develop fulfilling and sustainable careers.

- **Question for the Minister:** *Will the Government recognise that investing in the retention of family doctors is crucial in ensuring that GPs are supported to stay in the workforce and keep serving their communities?*