

# RCGP Briefing: Eating Disorder Awareness Week

## Westminster Hall Debate

### General Practice

**General practice is the cornerstone of the NHS, helping around 50 million people in England every year, carrying out 339.5 million appointments in 2022.** GPs and their teams have been through a significant period of evolution over the past few years including expanding multidisciplinary teams, at-scale collaboration and finding innovative ways to manage and deliver care. Despite rising pressures and one of the most challenging winters on record, GPs and their teams are working harder than ever to care for more patients in their community.

### General Practice and Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are serious, complex mental illnesses. They are characterised by disturbances in behaviours, thoughts and feelings towards body weight and shape, and/or food and eating. It is estimated that 1.25 million people in the UK have an eating disorder. **GPs want to provide the best quality care for patients with eating disorders and have a crucial role to play in the prevention, identification, diagnosis and management of these conditions.**

Eating disorders form part of the core RCGP 'Being a General Practitioner' curriculum. They are included in our Mental Health Study guide, and the RCGP promotes a specific eating-disorder course. We also provide Continuous Professional Development in this area via the 'Essential Knowledge Update' which includes modules on eating disorders.

The RCGP also plays an active role in the Parliamentary Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) Delivery Group, supporting the delivery of the recommendations set out in the PHSO 'Ignoring the Alarms' report and informing the actions required to improve care and treatment for adults and older adults with an eating disorder and co-existing mental health problems.

### Challenges

General practice is at breaking point, 27.1 million appointments were carried out by GPs in December 2022, compared with 21.8 million appointments in December 2018. **Whilst the number of appointments continue to grow each year, the number of FTE GPs has dropped by 1,808 since 2015.**

This increased level of workload is unsafe for GPs and their patients. Our survey last year found that **65% of GPs felt patient safety is compromised due to appointments being too short.** It is key that GPs have the time to safely assess patient needs when it comes to life threatening conditions such as eating disorders.

Increasingly unmanageable workloads are forcing many GPs out of the profession early, creating an ever-worsening workforce crisis, **42% of GPs surveyed by the RCGP report**

that they are planning to quit the profession in the next five years. Years of under-investment in general practice means there is a chronic shortage of GPs and other members of the practice team.

Current workforce and workload challenges mean **many GPs struggle to find the time to access Continued Professional Development (CPD)**. Having enough time to complete CPD is essential and helps to ensure that GPs are able to expand their knowledge and understanding of conditions like eating disorders, more must be done to protect time for CPD.

## Recommendations

- **More protected time for CPD incorporated in any future GP contract.** Support for CPD helps GPs expand their knowledge and understanding of conditions like eating disorders.
- **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