

RCGP Brief: Access to GP appointments and services in England

November 2022

The present crisis in general practice

General practice is the cornerstone of the NHS, helping around 50 million people in England every year, carrying out 370 million consultations last year. So, when GPs and their patients tell us that general practice is in crisis, we should all be concerned. 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, covering a cross section of doctors in different stages of their career and from across England.

The survey showed that:

- 68% of GPs say they don't have enough time to adequately assess and treat patients during appointments
- 64% of GPs say they don't have enough time during appointments to build the patient relationships they need to deliver quality care
- 65% of GPs say that patient safety is being compromised due to appointments being too short
- 34% say that the IT for their booking systems are not good enough
- 64% said their computer systems were not able to properly share information with hospitals
- 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.
- 68% of GPs said that making back-office functions more efficient would make a significant difference to GP workloads

- 74% of respondents to our survey said that their practice does not have sufficient physical space necessary to accommodate new staff
- 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
- 42% of GPs say that they are planning to quit the profession in the next five years

Recommendations

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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