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Chair of Council**

Rt. Hon. Sajid Javid MP
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0EU

4 November 2021

Dear Secretary of State

I feel compelled to write to you on behalf of the College's 54,000 members following your appearance before the Health and Social Care Select Committee on Tuesday 2 November.

We are dismayed and disappointed at the media coverage of your evidence session, which suggested that lack of face-to-face GP appointments was placing additional strain on Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments. You told the committee you had seen data which showed that more patients were presenting at A&E departments because they were unable to access primary care. I am not aware of any evidence to suggest that this is happening and would welcome sight of any data you have.

You will know from our previous conversations that morale amongst GPs is at an all-time low, in the face of increasingly unmanageable workload and hostility from sections of the media. Patients deserve quality care and safe care, but GPs are exhausted, with many at risk of burnout and quitting the profession. In a recent survey of our members, over 60% of GPs said their mental health had deteriorated significantly in the last year.

As the College has already made clear, the NHSEI package of support was a missed opportunity, completely failing to address the root causes of the crisis in general practice, in particular the workforce challenges. Moreover, the threats of punitive action to tackle variation in access will only serve to further demoralise an already beleaguered and exhausted profession. Attaching conditions to the winter access funding will only serve to penalise the very practices that most need help. What general practice urgently needs now is support and additional investment to recruit and retain staff as well as bolder action to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy so that they can provide the best care possible to their patients, in particular the suspension of QOF.

We welcome your acknowledgement, in the Committee session on Tuesday, that general practice is facing 'immense' pressure. However, we remain concerned that our own proposals for addressing these pressures, set out in our [Action plan for recovery](#), have so far been overlooked.

The College was not surprised to hear that the government's target for an extra 6,000 GPs by 2024 is not on track - we have been warning that workforce targets have been slipping for some time. The absence of any strategy to rectify this is alarming. While GP recruitment is progressing well, we cannot expand the workforce unless we stem the flow of GPs quitting the profession. Data collected by the College suggests that we are at risk of losing 14,000 GPs within the next five years, or roughly 2,800 each year. However, the current national retention scheme only supports around 600 GPs to remain in the workforce part-time. It is clear that existing GP retention initiatives are not working and need a complete rethink. That is why we were very disappointed that the GP access plan did not include any new measures to improve workforce retention.

You said in your session with the Health Select Committee that you were keen to work with GPs to identify what further support Government can provide. We would be happy to host an engagement event or roundtable with GPs to explore what that support might look like and what else can be done to alleviate workload pressures and improve retention. We could also arrange a practice visit so you can better understand the pressures frontline GPs are facing.

I hope we can move forward in a constructive way to resolve the crisis in general practice before we reach the point at which morale in the profession and public trust in GPs is irreparably damaged.

I look forward to your reply.

Best wishes,
Professor Martin Marshall
Chair of Council