

RCGP Briefing: Performance of NHS

Waiting times

November 2022

General Practice

General practice is the cornerstone of the NHS, carrying out 370 million consultations last year. We have been through a significant period of evolution over the past few years which has been accelerated by the pandemic, including expanding multidisciplinary teams, at and practices using new technology to scale collaboration, find innovative ways to manage and deliver care.

Yet general practice is under immense strain. GPs on average now look after 16% more patients than in 2015 and our recent surveys found that 68% of GPs say they don't have enough time to adequately assess and treat patients during appointments.

Waiting times targets

GP access is important, but it is only a starting point to ensuring our patients receive the safe, personalised, and appropriate care they need.

According to the latest figures, GPs and their teams are delivering more patient consultations every month than before the pandemic. Speed of access has also significantly increased with around 45% of appointments now delivered on the same day they were booked, and around two thirds delivered in person.

The RCGP is particularly concerned about the danger of unintended consequences of new targets and league tables. Many patients want to have the opportunity to book appointments weeks in advance either because they are regular health checks, or a clinician has advised them that if their condition has not improved by that time, they would need further consideration. The current waiting time statistics include these kinds of appointments meaning they do not necessarily reflect inappropriate or unwanted delays.

The College has always said that post-pandemic, patients should be able to access GP care and services in a variety of ways depending on their health needs and preferences. This is already happening. Many patients will prefer to see their GP in person, but many also find remote consulting convenient and effective, and we know that good, safe and appropriate care can be delivered remotely.

What do we want

What must be addressed are the huge workload and workforce pressures that are the real reason why patients are facing such long waits to see a GP.

Ultimately, we need to see;

- A new recruitment and retention strategy that goes beyond the target of 6,000 GPs pledged by the Government in its election manifesto.
- Funding for general practice returned to 11% of the total health spend.
- Investment in IT systems and premises.
- Steps to cut bureaucracy so that GPs can spend more time delivering the care patients need and deserve.