

RCGP Briefing: If he will bring forward a plan to increase (a) retention and (b) recruitment of NHS staff?

Janet Daby MP, Health oral questions, 24th January 2023

Recruitment

General practice is the cornerstone of the NHS, helping around 50 million people in England every year, carrying out 370 million consultations last year.

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.
- 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.

General practice is under immense strain which is resulting in workforce and workload challenges that are contributing to unsustainable levels of workload in addition to difficulties for patients in accessing care.

Years of under-investment in general practice and the chronic shortage of GPs and other members of the practice team means that without urgent action from politicians and NHS decision makers, the ability of general practice to meet patients' needs is in jeopardy.

Recommendations:

- Publish a detailed plan to achieve and go beyond the targets of 6000 extra full-time equivalent GPs and 26,000 additional staff in non-GP roles.
- Make it easier for international doctors who complete their training as NHS GPs to apply for long-term visas to stay and work in the UK, bringing the situation into line with trainee doctors in other parts of the NHS.
- Expand the number of GP training places by at least 10% year on year. This must sit alongside action to increase the number of trainers and improvements to premises to further expand teaching in general practice.

Retention

The most impactful way to meet this growing demand is to expand the general practice workforce. To address this workforce crisis, action needs to be taken on two fronts:

1. There needs to be a sustained increased inflow of doctors to the profession, with GP training capacity expanded.
2. More GPs need to be supported to remain working in general practice for longer.

Our 2022 survey of RCGP members found that **39% of the GP workforce across the UK are seriously considering leaving the profession within the next five years.** This could translate to over 22,000 GPs leaving the workforce across all four nations. Pressures will continue to intensify for those still in practice, creating a vicious cycle whereby increasing numbers of GPs continue to leave the workforce due to insurmountable pressures.

Urgent action is needed to break this cycle, supporting today's GPs to stay in practice, while we continue to train tomorrow's GPs.

Recommendations:

- A comprehensive review of existing retention initiatives backed by an investment of £150 million per year in England and commensurate amounts in the devolved nations.
 - Develop local retention initiatives so that every GP can access tailored support to stay in the profession for longer.
 - Ensure funding is available in every locality for GPs to access a national retention scheme for those at highest risk of leaving the profession.
- Evaluate and improve induction and career support programmes for early career GPs.
- Build capacity at network or system level to introduce increased flexibility and new opportunities across local areas.
- Take action to improve GP workload, in particular to support the delivery of relationship-based care.
- Expand multidisciplinary teams in general practice and invest in support for integration and supervision of new roles.
- Publish improved workforce data across the UK, in order to inform better workforce planning.
- Develop impactful communications for patients which demonstrate the role of the GP and help to explain what a patient can expect from their practice, including seeing different members of the team.