


Agenda Item 6

<p>General Practice</p>  <p>Lincolnshire COUNTY COUNCIL <i>Working for a better future</i></p>		<p>THE HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR LINCOLNSHIRE</p>	
Boston Borough Council	East Lindsey District Council	City of Lincoln Council	Lincolnshire County Council
North Kesteven District Council	South Holland District Council	South Kesteven District Council	West Lindsey District Council

Open Report on behalf of Lincolnshire Local Medical Committee (LMC)

Report to	Health Scrutiny Committee for Lincolnshire
Date:	13 April 2022
Subject:	General Practice Access

Summary:

The Health Scrutiny Committee for Lincolnshire has requested that Lincolnshire Local Medical Committee provide a report on access to general practice services.

Nationally demand for general practice appointments is higher than it has ever been, but workforce in general practices has shrunk. This mismatch leads to practices not having capacity to provide the access which patients and the system would like.

A recent poll of 1,395 GPs from across Great Britain found:

- **Nearly 9 in 10** GPs fear patients aren't always safe at their surgeries
- **7 out of 10 GPs** feel the risk to 'patient safety' is increasing
- GPs cited staff shortages and too little time for appointments as the main factors putting patients at risk -
 - **86% of GPs** stated they didn't have enough time with patients
 - **77% of GPs** said GP shortages were putting patient safety at risk

Despite this general practices are providing 6% more appointments now than pre-pandemic and 66% of appointments remain face-to-face.

Actions Required:

The Committee are invited to review the work being undertaken to support the system.

1. Background

Role of Lincolnshire Local Medical Committee

Local medical committees are statutory entities, whose primary role is representing the views of GPs and GP practices for a given area. The Lincolnshire Local Medical Committee represent around 450 GPs, whether partners, salaried GPs, or freelance locums.

National Position

General practice nationally is over-stretched. An older population with more long-term conditions was already increasing workload before the pandemic, and pandemic pressures have exacerbated this.

General practices have a backlog of care caused by the pandemic: patients with long-term conditions require input and follow up, pandemic-related mental health issues have spiralled, acute illness presentations and Covid-related illnesses persist, and patients awaiting hospital treatment rely upon their general practices.

Hospital trusts have long waiting lists due to the pandemic. This has an impact on general practice as patients seek support from their general practice and have increased health needs which cannot be managed by secondary care.

As of January 2022 in England there is the equivalent of 1,608 fewer fully qualified full-time GPs compared to 2015. In the year between December 2020 and January 2022 alone the number of fully qualified GPs by headcount decreased by 300 net in just over one year

To compensate for the reduced numbers of GPs and nurses practices and Primary Care Networks (PCNs) now employ other health professionals who can manage patient conditions: clinical pharmacists, paramedic practitioners, first contact physiotherapists, social prescribers, mental health practitioners, and more. These professionals are qualified to manage conditions in their sphere of practice, but do not have the holistic skills of a GP.

Lincolnshire Position

Lincolnshire's PCNs have not used their entire allocation of funding for additional roles due to a number of factors: funding is restricted to specific job roles; Lincolnshire has a deficit of available professionals in these roles; practices in rural and coastal communities are less able to recruit; and additional roles funding is limited by national pay scales which disadvantages rural PCNs. To ensure people speak to, and are dealt with, by the person most appropriate, practices are using online and telephone tools to allocate workload.

Appointments in Lincolnshire's general practices¹

	Dec 2019	Dec 2021	Change
Total Appointments	347,612	370,170	+6%
Face to Face	282,130 (81%)	243,952 (66%)	

Despite a reduced workforce Lincolnshire's general practices have increased their appointments by 6% since pre-pandemic.

This data is based upon NHS Digital count of appointments; however this does not include the clinical work which is carried out outside an appointment, such as reviewing blood test results, reading and dealing with hospital correspondence, and managing prescriptions. A survey carried out across general practices shows that NHS Digital data misses an extra 50% - 70% of general practice clinical activity.

The Policy Exchange recently published a report into general practice², this cites that GPs should do no more than 25-30 clinical contacts per day to maintain safety. However, NHS figures show that GPs are doing on average 47 contacts per day.

Increasing workload is causing GPs and other clinical staff to leave the profession early.

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One third of GPs report suffering from depression, burn out, or mental distress.

This situation is not of the GP's making. A lack of workforce planning and other factors have resulted in the position that GPs feel that the health service is now unsafe for patients and practitioners.

2. Consultation

This is not a consultation item.

3. Conclusion

Lincolnshire general practice is under dual pressures of increasing demand and workforce shortages. Despite this, Lincolnshire's practices have increased the number of appointments they are providing. Primary Care Networks have not been able to recruit adequately to additional roles, this is worse in Lincolnshire due to the rural and coastal locality. Self-care and prevention must be prioritised to alleviate future pressures on health and social care.

A lack of workforce planning, and other factors, has resulted in the position that GPs feel that the Health Service is now unsafe for patients and practitioners.

4. Background Papers

1. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/appointments-in-general-practice/appointments-in-general-practice-supporting-information>
2. <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/at-your-service/>

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