



3 MINUTE BRIEF – GENERAL PRACTICE

What?

In recent months both clinical leads for Primary Care in Moray have visited our GP practices. At these visits it was clear that every practice in Moray is under significant strain, with common themes emerging that are detailed below. Two practices (Aberlour and Fochabers) have required significant support from Health & Social Care to continue operational delivery, with this support ongoing at Aberlour.

- 1) General Practices throughout Moray are facing challenges in providing safe and effective primary care to patients. A diverse array of external pressures are exerting considerable strain on these practices, pushing many to the brink of sustainability. While similar feasibility issues are evident across the north of Scotland, the impact is particularly acute in Moray due to a combination of factors outlined in the attached documents, including an IJB paper, a letter to the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care, and the subsequent reply.
- 2) The demand for services in General Practice has surged significantly. While media and political attention have primarily focused on A&E wait times and growing secondary care waiting lists, there has been a notable shift of responsibilities toward General Practice. Analysis of GPAS data, In Hours Dashboard figures, and independent consulting trend assessments reveal a substantial increase. The total number of consultations per patient per year for all staff has risen from 11 to 25 over the past two decades, and for GPs, this has increased from 5 to 8 (refer to the attached Consultation Patterns BMJ paper). Notably, these trends have accelerated since the paper's publication, as indicated by the attached General Practice Data pdf and GPAS report. For instance, at Maryhill, the total number of quarterly clinical GP appointments, including emergency duty appointments and scheduled GP clinics, has risen significantly from 10,827 in October to December 2019 to 20,999 for the quarter spanning July to September 2023. This surge is further supported by GPAS data, revealing 80,000 to 90,000 GP appointments occurring on a weekly basis across Grampian. These figures underscore the intensifying demand placed on General Practice services, highlighting the need for a comprehensive and sustainable approach to meet the evolving healthcare landscape.
- 3) The 2018 national GMS contract has failed in its stated intent to take work away from GPs. Locally its implementation has been dogged by recruitment difficulties and clawing back of funding, while the establishment of teams within practices has faced significant operational challenges (particularly relating to CTAC services, but extending to other streams also). Spending on PCIP staff is high (representing 32.81% of total general practice staff spend – 2023 Association of Independent Specialist Medical Accountants figures). Data from Maryhill shows that cost per consultation is disproportionately high for PCIP staff compared to those who are practice employed (General Practice Data pdf.)
- 4) Investment in core general practice (designated as General Medical Service PMS in attached Health Budget Trends pdf) has fallen from 6.21% of total health budget spend in 2016/17 to 5.15% in current year. Historically this figure sat at 10 to 12% throughout the eighties and nineties. Investment has also fallen 15% behind inflation and 25% behind total health budget uplift over the last seven years.



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- 5) Worsening secondary care waiting lists (see attached NHS Grampian Waiting Times pdf, which shows many specialities with waits of over one year, and over 3 years 3 months for routine urology) are adding pressure to General Practice. Patients who are waiting for tests, consultations or interventions visit their GP practice more often and experience worsening health and socioeconomic outcomes. Waits for orthopaedic, vascular and cardiology interventions can be particularly difficult for patients, leading to significant increase general practice consultations (General Practice Data pdf.) There is also a concerning trend towards a higher proportion of cancers being metastatic at diagnosis, with the associated reduction in curative treatment options and an increase in mortality.
- 6) General Practice premises need significant investment. Across Moray practices are struggling to house their expanded multidisciplinary teams and patient care is suffering. There is also concern that projected population growth from planned housing developments will exacerbate this issue.
- 7) Morale is at an all-time low. The 2023 GP Wellbeing survey in Scotland showed that 85% of GPs say they sometimes, or regularly, struggle to cope and work is having a negative impact on their physical and mental wellbeing – with 31% saying they are unable to achieve a good work-life balance and it is getting significantly worse over recent times. A quarter of GPs are planning to leave their practice in the next two years, while three quarters say the last year has made them more likely to leave the profession entirely (BMA Scotland GP Wellbeing pdf.)

So What?

- 1) The challenges affecting Moray's General Practices have far-reaching implications for both the wider healthcare system and our communities. The surge in demand, coupled with inadequate investment and operational issues, jeopardises the delivery of quality primary care.
- 2) The shortcomings of the national GMS contract and the declining morale among GPs & their staff are compounding factors that will intensify the shortage of healthcare professionals, directly affecting the quality of patient care. As GPs experience diminishing job satisfaction and an increasing likelihood of leaving their practices or the profession altogether, the impending workforce shortages pose a significant risk. This potential exodus could diminish the healthcare system's ability to provide essential primary care services, adding an additional layer of strain to the broader healthcare infrastructure.
- 3) The relative underinvestment in core general practice, coupled with increasing costs, will cause worsening financial difficulties for practices. This could limit the resources available for essential health services and worsen patient outcomes.
- 4) Insufficient investment in GP premises has led to outdated and inadequate infrastructure, impacting the ability of GP practices to offer modern and efficient healthcare services. This will compromise patient comfort, accessibility, and the overall quality of care provided. This will impact on capacity to accommodate growing populations, reduce workforce content and worsen patient experiences.
- 5) The shifting of workload from secondary care to General Practice, combined with deteriorating waiting lists, has escalated the burden on GP medical services. This heightened pressure may result in delays in administering treatments, thereby adversely affecting patient outcomes.



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- 6) As General Practices struggle to meet demand, there will likely be a higher influx of patients seeking care at emergency services, exacerbating existing pressures on A&E departments.
- 7) Communities may face challenges in accessing timely and adequate healthcare services, leading to potential health disparities and worsening health outcomes for residents.
- 8) The struggle to deliver safe and effective primary care may compromise the quality of healthcare services available to communities. This could lead to increased health risks, reduced overall community well-being and worsening health inequality
- 9) Communities with limited access to well-functioning General Practices may experience disparities in health outcomes, as some residents may face barriers in receiving timely and adequate medical attention.
- 10) Poor community health, exacerbated by healthcare challenges, may have broader economic implications. Increased healthcare needs and delayed interventions could lead to increased absenteeism and reduced productivity in the workforce.

Now What?

- 1) Addressing these implications requires a comprehensive approach, involving strategic investments, policy adjustments, and collaborative efforts between healthcare providers, policymakers, and communities to ensure the resilience and effectiveness of the healthcare system at both the local and regional levels. This necessitates prioritising general practice and community-driven patient care as the focal points in health strategic planning. It is crucial to actively engage general practice in shaping future health plans, thereby enabling the delivery of high-quality, community-based, and patient-centred care. This approach aims to reintegrate proactive and preventative healthcare into the core of our healthcare system, a key feature of the wider NHS Grampian health strategy.
- 2) The 2023 Moray Joint Strategic Needs Assessment allows us an opportunity to utilise health data and consider how best to allocate resources to best look after our communities.
- 3) The GP Vision work affords us an opportunity to collaborate with stakeholders and patients to develop a sustainable model to deliver general practice with local flexibilities that best meet the needs of our patients. It is also a chance to reassess the national GMS contract, addressing its shortcomings and modifying its provisions to better align with the needs of local General Practices and the evolving healthcare landscape.
- 4) The Moray Growth Deal offers an exciting opportunity to invest in health information technology and digital solutions to streamline processes, enhance patient care, and improve overall operational efficiency. Harnessing personalised data stores, seamlessly integrating technological apps to coordinate services, incorporating health monitoring devices, and placing a strong emphasis on preventative health measures promise an exciting future for our Moray patients.

By combining strategic investments, policy adjustments, and collaborative efforts, stakeholders can work together to build a more resilient and responsive healthcare system. This holistic approach addresses the identified challenges and ensures that GP services are not only accessible but also of high quality, meeting the needs of communities both now and in the future.



Benefits

Investing in the sustainability of General Practice yields numerous rewards that extend beyond individual practices to positively impact patients, communities, and the overall healthcare system. Some key benefits include:

- 1) Investments in General Practice premises leads to improved infrastructure and expanded facilities, increasing the capacity to accommodate more patients and reducing wait times for appointments. This also allows for the improvement of working conditions, creating a positive and supportive environment that enhances the job satisfaction and well-being of healthcare professionals.
- 2) Quality general practice supports preventive care and early intervention, contributing to the timely detection and management of health issues, ultimately improving patient health outcomes. Focussing on preventive care can reduce the economic burden associated with treating advanced or chronic conditions. This allows General Practices to actively engage in health promotion and education initiatives within the community, contributing to overall public health awareness and well-being.
- 3) Easing pressure on GPs facilitates continuity & the maintenance of long-term relationships between patients and their doctors, improving patient outcomes and reducing wider impact on the healthcare system.
- 4) Focusing on technological solutions enhances the efficiency of administrative tasks, medical record-keeping, and communication, leading to more streamlined and effective healthcare services. Patient experiences are improved.
- 5) Well supported General Practices contribute to a positive patient experience, fostering trust in the healthcare system and promoting higher levels of patient satisfaction. Surgeries become a cornerstone of community health, encouraging active participation and collaboration between healthcare providers and the community.

Creating a sustainable General Practice is essential for building a resilient and patient-centred healthcare system, promoting overall community health, and achieving long-term cost savings through preventive measures and early intervention. Not doing so risks more practices ceasing to deliver healthcare, negatively impacting the wider health system and leading to worse health outcomes for patients & increasing health inequality.

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Attached documents –

- Consultation_patterns_BMJ
- IJB Report - General Practice Sustainability
- 2023-11-17 Grampian LMC GPAS Sitrep
- BMA Scotland GP Wellbeing
- General Practice Data
- Health Budgets Trends
- Letter to Cabinet Secretary Final
- NHS Grampian Waiting Times
- Response-202300363844 Michael Matheson