

Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery Health and Social Care
 Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson Ath-shlànachadh NHS, Slàinte agus Cùram Sòisealta
Michael Matheson MSP/BPA



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Our Reference: 202300363844
 Your Reference: -

13 July 2023

Dear Councillor Colyer,

Thank you for your letter of 13 June on behalf of the Moray Integration Joint Board, regarding GP sustainability in Moray.

I appreciate your concerns regarding the provision of primary care services in Moray. General practice is at the heart of the NHS. Every year in Scotland, GPs and other clinical staff carry out over 23 million appointments, and the vast majority of these cases are dealt with from start to finish in the local Practice. This vital work is very much valued and appreciated, especially over the past three years, when, on top of the regular pressures which GPs and their colleagues face, has been added additional pressure related to the Covid pandemic and its aftermath.

GP Recruitment

We are making good progress on our commitment to recruit 800 new GPs by 2027, with Scotland's GP headcount increasing by 291 from 4,918 to a record high 5,209 from 2017 to 2022.

GP headcount has risen every single year since 2016, alongside an increase in part-time working and a vast increase (since 2018) in multi-disciplinary team members working in practices. The decrease in GP WTE from the 2022 GP Workforce Survey demonstrates more GPs choosing to work part-time. This is for a range of reasons including to develop portfolio careers taking on important clinical lead roles within Health Boards, as well as to achieve work life balance.

The 2021-22 Programme for Government also committed us to expanding the number of medical school training places by at least 100 per year from 2021-22, and doubling the number of funded

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widening access places to 120 per year, so that more GPs are being trained at our Universities. The former Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care recently announced an increase of 35 GP Specialty training places for 2023, and this is likely to be followed by further increases in the coming years.

As well as training new GPs here in Scotland, the Scottish Government is investing £11 million over the next 5 years in new national and international recruitment campaigns, in order to encourage qualified GPs from other countries to come and work in Scotland. As well as both training and recruiting GPs, we have also recruited over 3,220 Multi-Disciplinary Team members to work in practices across Scotland. These Pharmacists, Advanced Nurse Practitioners, Mental Health Workers, MSK Physiotherapists and Community Link Workers help support patients, and can offer a range of specialist skills.

Remote and Rural General Practice

Scottish Government is committed to supporting and developing rural primary care, and is taking forward a range of initiatives to support recruitment and retention of workforce in rural General Practice. These include a Golden Hello scheme to attract new rural GPs, and ScotGEM, a graduate-entry medical degree with a rural focus. The Scottish Government is also supporting an innovative recruitment campaign called Rediscover The Joy (RTJ). RTJ aims to recruit experienced GPs to provide support for remote and rural practices. Scottish Government is working to develop a Remote and Rural workforce recruitment strategy by the end of 2024. This will support employers to ensure that the Health and Social Care needs of people who live in remote and rural communities are met.

We are also working closely with NHS Education for Scotland on scoping a national centre for excellence for remote and rural health and social care. If approved, the Centre will be delivered by NHS Education Scotland (NES), with initial focus on Primary Care in remote, rural and island communities, and will play a key role in maintaining a rural focus on Recruitment and Retention, Education and Training, Research and Evaluation, Leadership and Good Practice.

The Scottish Government has made significant progress implementing the 'Shaping the Future Together' Report's recommendations. Important achievements include restating our unequivocal commitment to maintaining the income and expenses guarantee under current contractual and funding arrangements, publishing the Digital Health and Care Strategy in October 2021, which has facilitated the development of the Digital Front Door, NHS Care App, and Near Me, which has enabled 1.8 million appointments since launch, and work to deliver on the commitment to increase the number of medical students by 500 throughout the lifetime of Parliament, through promoting the recruitment of medical, nursing, pharmacy and allied health professional students in remote and rural areas through schemes including ScotGEM, and a pharmacy remote and rural longitudinal clerkship.

Primary Care Multi-Disciplinary Teams

To support GP practices, we have recruited more than 3,220 healthcare professionals since 2018 and are committed to investing at least £170 million a year on delivery of primary care multi-disciplinary teams. We are making funding available on top of that to cover Agenda for Change uplifts for MDT staff. The average practice in Scotland now has access to over 3 WTE additional MDT professionals. In short, we remain committed to the GP contract and the delivery of extended MDTs, making it easier for patients to see the right person, at the right time, in GP practices and the community.

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Pay Uplifts to General Practice

The Scottish Government reflected the recommendation of the Doctors and Dentist Pay Review Body (DDRB) when we uplifted the value of the GP contract. That recommendation was for a 4.5% increase for GPs. We based our uplift on that, as well as a 5% increase for practice staff and 4.5% for non-staff practice expenses.

This is a separate process to the pay awards for NHS employed staff. While in previous years we have used the Agenda for Change settlement as a reference for GP practice staff, that settlement was not known until late in 2022 and is part of a different budget from primary care. The uplift for general practice is the most we were able to commit in a very challenging financial situation and does not reflect any lower value put on the work of general practice staff compared to other groups in different situations. The Scottish Government will consider an uplift for general practice in 2023/24 once we have received the DDRB's recommendation.

The Scottish Government makes an allocation to Health & Social Care Partnerships most years to fund premises improvements. We are considering how much to allocate this financial year, but I must advise the fund is generally to cover minor improvements and will not extend to significant sums. Health Boards can request larger capital sums from the Scottish Government for specific projects and we would consider any business case for a new premises presented to us by them.

Secondary Care Waiting Times

Regarding secondary care waiting times, we published the [NHS Recovery Plan](#) in August 2021, which sets out our plans for health and social care over the next 5 years. Backed by over £1 billion of funding, the plan will support an increase in inpatient, day case, and outpatient activity to address the backlogs of care, which will be supported by the implementation of sustainable improvements and new models of care. The first annual progress update was published on 4 October and can be viewed here: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/nhs-recovery-plan-annual-progress-update/>. This update detailed the progress being made against the actions to address the backlog in care and meet ongoing healthcare needs for people across Scotland.

In July 2022 we introduced a series of ambitious targets for NHS Scotland to address the backlog of long waiting patients. This gave Health Boards full flexibility to focus on treating people that are waiting too long for routine treatment, as well as continuing to treat the most clinically urgent patients. The latest Public Health Scotland [statistical publication](#) shows Boards are making good progress with this, with waits of over two years reduced in the majority of specialities for both new outpatients and inpatient/day-cases, and a reduction of 48.5% in new outpatients waits over 18 months since June 2022.

I hope this information is helpful, and thank you again for taking the time to bring these matters to my attention.

Yours sincerely,



MICHAEL MATHESON

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