

Public Audit Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

****By email****

Audit Scotland Report: General Practice

Dear Convenor,

I am aware your committee will be considering Audit Scotland's 'General practice: Progress since the 2018 General Medical Services contract' report, and I wanted to take the opportunity to outline BMA Scotland, and specifically the view of the Scottish general practice committee (SGPC), to this report.

The Audit Scotland report demonstrates in forensic detail exactly why so many practices across Scotland are struggling to meet demand and the continuous and enormous pressures so many GPs are having to work under. The failure to invest in General Practice and plan effectively to recruit GPs is taking its inevitable toll.

The 2018 General Medical Services (GMS) contract envisaged significant reform to the primary care landscape and substantial change to GP earnings and expenses, all of which was expected to be delivered within a three-year timeframe. The BMA's Scottish GP committee gave their best efforts to support the Scottish Government to achieve what was set out, including thorough revisions to the Memorandum of Understanding and work to progress phase two of negotiations. However what has been delivered more than seven years since the start of the contract has failed to create anywhere near the services and capacity promised to the profession by the Scottish Government. Given the rising demand from a growing and ageing population, with more complex health conditions, it means GPs are simply unable to provide the best possible service to their patients and the community.

The Audit Scotland report warns that the Scottish Government's commitment to increase the number of GPs working in Scotland by at least 800 by 2027 will not be met and that this additional number may not be sufficient to meet the health needs of the population. BMA Scotland has been warning of the lack of progress on this target for some time. It is clear Scotland needs more GPs to meet the demand of the population and there is a need to step up action not only recruit more GPs but to make sure that we are retaining the existing workforce.

Central to that must be to invest directly in GPs, which the 2018 contract failed to do and as a result, GP practices across the country are having to consider reducing services to balance their books. Also and

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paradoxically, some newly qualified GPs are struggling for work as practices simply cannot afford to employ the doctors which are desperately needed.

We have called upon the Scottish Government to urgently address the shocking situation that General Practice is in and invest directly in GP practices. The funding practices receive for every patient has been eroded year after year against inflation since 2008. In all, eroded funding streams and new cost pressures have created a shortfall in practice funding of 22.8 per cent, and some £290m will be required to close that gap and deliver full funding restoration.

GPs share the frustration that many patients are currently feeling and we want to be able to deliver a service that we are proud of but this can only be achieved if urgent action is taken to address this funding gap – around 1 per cent of the Scottish NHS budget – to stabilise General Practice and begin the process of giving our patients the access they need and deserve.

Increasing the proportion of the NHS budget which goes to General Practice to 15% would mean an extra 1800 WTE GPs across Scotland; allowing us to massively improve patient access, bringing huge benefits across the NHS. A properly resourced General Practice can offer so much to the health and wellbeing of Scotland but the dire predicament we are in now – as illustrated by Audit Scotland - means we need immediate action to safeguard the bedrock of the NHS.

General practice provides 90 per cent of patient contact and without it, the NHS simply cannot survive. There is currently only one GP in Scotland for every 1,735 people, when that used to be every 1,515 people. We need to be far more ambitious and work towards a commitment of one WTE GP for every 1,000 people, which would allow GPs to deliver far more in terms of preventative health and a more individualised health experience.

There is huge potential for a revolution in how we can approach healthcare in Scotland by getting everyone to live the healthiest life they can – but this can only be realised if GPs are given the necessary resources and support.

Yours sincerely

Dr Iain Morrison
Scottish general practice committee chair