

Government needs to put its money where its mouth is to fix our GP crisis – Chair of Royal College of GPs

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With general practice facing an existential fight for survival, the Government needs to seize the moment and ensure GP services across the country are properly resourced and properly funded.

That's the view of the chair of the Royal College of General Practitioners, Kamila Hawthorne.

Speaking ahead of the publication of the long-awaited NHS workforce strategy, Mrs Hawthorne told Newcross Healthcare's Voice of Care podcast series: "It's a real opportunity for the government to put its money where its mouth is and actually provide us with hope that we will be receiving strengthening of our workforce. Because really the bottom line problem is that we don't have enough GPs, we're not adequately resourced, we're not adequately funded."

With figures showing that 42% of GPs are considering leaving in the next five years, the Government has pledged to increase GP numbers by 6000 by 2025.

For the moment, however, Mrs Hawthorne remains sceptical about Government's intentions. She said: "I think we take about 9% of the NHS budget. 10, 12 years ago it was 11%. So it's gone down and it should be at least 11%, if not higher."

"The devil will be in the detail ...until we actually see the devil of what's on offer and also what the government wants in return, because I'm very worried that the amount of emphasis that's being put on access to general practice might actually give the killer blow to general practice, which would be awful.

"We've seen waves of doctors gradually getting older without them being replaced enough by younger doctors.

"So it is no real surprise that we've got to where we are now and has been made a great deal worse by the fantastically increased workload that has come upon us really since the end of the lockdown. The Covid-19 lockdown workload just suddenly increased exponentially, way beyond anything we'd even experienced before COVID and as a result, I think a lot of GPs are leaving the profession early.

"Even though the numbers of trainees has gone up, GP's are leaving faster than the younger ones are coming in at the other end and as a result, over the last 2 or 3 years, we're at least 850 full-time equivalent GP's less in England than we were a couple of years ago and that trend is continuing, which is why it's so worrying.

"The other worrying thing about it is of course that these are people who are at the height of their powers, they're in their mid to late 50s. They've been GPs for 20, 30 years. They are needed to provide mentorship for the younger ones, and yet they are so fed up with the constant workload that the barrage of work that they're being faced with, that they are leaving early. And that is a real, real shame."

Addressing the issue of the workload crisis faced by GPs, Mrs Hawthorne said: "I think for me, it's actually priority number one because unless we can do something about the workforce workload crisis, GPs just don't have the headspace to think about very much else.

"There's an awful lot of paperwork that we're being asked to do that really doesn't require a doctor's qualifications to do."

Mrs Hawthorne goes on to highlight some of the problems involved in their strategy to recruit more GPs from overseas, including inequalities in the system that are undermining their efforts to bolster the workforce.

She said: "What we're finding is that some of our international medical graduate GPs are finding themselves really so harassed and so unwelcomed here that they're thinking of either returning home or leaving to go to Canada or Australia and New Zealand looking for a better work-life balances.

"And we need to find ways to make sure that everybody is welcomed and valued because we really, really need every single one of them.

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“My parents were first generation doctors in the late 1950s and they stayed for a few years and then left because of discrimination, went to East Africa, came back ten years later and have then stayed. But it is really sad to see the same story repeating itself 60 years on.”

Hosted by healthcare expert Suhail Mirza, the podcast episode featuring Kamila Hawthorne is available now alongside previous episodes in the series on various platforms including [YouTube](#), Apple, Spotify and the [Newcross Healthcare](#) website.

Company Contact:

[Blue Lozenge](#)

E. giles@bluelozenge.co.uk

W. <https://www.bluelozenge.co.uk>

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