

RCGP briefing on Amendment 29B for stronger workforce planning in the Health and Care Bill

April 2022

Amendment 29B will be considered in the House of Commons on Monday 25th April and you have a significant opportunity to support the change that our NHS desperately needs.

Why do we need stronger NHS workforce planning?

General practice and the wider NHS cannot deliver the care patients need without the workforce to do it and in recent years, the general practice workforce has not grown in tandem with demand. This means that GPs and their teams are having to work harder to meet patient needs, and some patients are facing difficulties in accessing care.

This pressure is becoming unsustainable, driving GPs out of the workforce, and threatening to destabilise general practice:

- On average, each GP looks after almost 10% more patients than they did in 2015.
- In 2019, 68% of surveyed GPs found it difficult to recruit a GP, which rose to 70% in 2020.^{i ii}
- 34% of surveyed GPs in England, in 2021, indicating plans to leave practice within the next five years.ⁱⁱⁱ

Despite Government commitments to improving workforce planning in the NHS and 'increasing transparency and accountability' - including a Conservative Manifesto target of 6,000 GPs and 26,000 other practice staff by 2024 - neither DHSC, NHSEI or HEE have published a detailed plan setting out how they were going to achieve these numbers. This made it harder to hold the system to account and helps explain why, despite all these big promises, the qualified full-time equivalent GP workforce is smaller today than back in 2015.

How can this be addressed?

It is vital that the system develops and implements a detailed plan to fill workforce shortages, with clear lines of accountability for delivery.

The RCGP have joined 100 health and care organisations, the health and social care select committee and cross-party parliamentarians in both Houses in calling for a requirement for a strengthened reporting duty on workforce planning to begin putting our health and care workforce back on a sustainable footing, support more strategic spending decisions and provide long-term cost savings. Amendment 29B to the Health and Care Bill gives government and MPs the opportunity to find a solution.

The Health and Care Bill is a crucial opportunity for stronger workforce planning to be embedded into our health and care system through legislation. We strongly urge you to support this amendment, which is returning to the Commons to be considered for the third time on Monday 25th April. Since it was last in the Commons, the amendment has been modified to take into account feedback from the government so far.

What changes have been made to the amendment and why?

During the last consideration of Lords amendments in the Commons, Health Minister Ed Argar said Amendment 29 was not 'necessary in its current form' and we hope this was a signal that government is open to finding a compromise on this issue.

Amendment 29B in lieu, revised from the last time MPs voted on the Health and Care Bill, seeks to address some of the government's concerns:

- it now requires the Secretary of State to publish a workforce assessment **every three years, rather than two**.
- It revises down the maximum length of projections to 15 years to align with government's own plans.
- It removes the requirement for assessments to be independently verified.

The future of the NHS is in your hands and we urge you to do what is right, and vote in favour of Amendment 29B.

Please contact Tanisha.Dadar@rcgp.org.uk if you have any questions.

ⁱ RCGP English GPs Tracking Survey, Wave 7. October 2019. Accessed at: <https://comresglobal.com/polls/royal-college-of-generalpractitioners-rcgp-english-gps-tracking-survey-wave-7-october-2019/>

ⁱⁱ Based on surveys of GPs in each nation of the UK in 2020. In field Feb–April 2020 (sample of 1183 GPs). Data representative of GPs who said they were involved in recruitment, excluding “don't knows”

ⁱⁱⁱ RCGP survey of 1,281 GPs in England, in field March 7th to April 8th 2021.