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General Practice Trends in the UK to 2015

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This product may be of interest to remuneration boards, employers, stakeholders, policy officials, commissioners and members of the public. Interests will range from comparisons of the NHS workforce at local, regional and national levels to managing recruitment, staffing and training and prioritising commissioning.

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1. Introduction

This paper collates information on General Practice trends in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The paper includes figures on country level workforce trends, as well as average practice list sizes and population projections. There is also a section on breakdown of contract types in England.

The latest figures available are for 2015 and these are taken from each country's General Practice publications and from the Office of National Statistics, which compiles and publishes population estimates for each of the UK constituent countries (see Data Sources). All residential population figures are updated mid-year estimates for 2015, which have been revised and rebased using the 2011 Census.

The differences between the figures for GP registered patients and residential population are expected and there are a number of reasons contributing to the differences. This GP "list inflation" may be caused, for example, by patients who have not been removed from patient lists following death, emigration or moving home, patients being dual registered at practices following a change of address or due to registered patients not completing the 2011 Census.

GP numbers are across all contract types for each of the countries and the GP numbers in Tables 1-5 represent headcount and do not therefore reflect changes in working patterns. Figures shown may differ from those previously published due to revised data and changes in data sources.

Changes in data sources, unstated GP types and locum numbers

In England the primary data source for General and Personal Medical statistics has changed from the National Health Authority Information System (NHAIS) to the workforce Minimum Data Set (wMDS) collected via the Primary Care Web Tool (PCWT) Workforce Census module and the workforce Minimum Data Set Collection Vehicle (wMDSCV). 88.1 per cent of eligible general practices provided a return for this collection at 30 September 2015; information for the remaining 11.9 per cent of practices was estimated. In addition, there are a number of GPs (3,228) that cannot be identified as having a specific job role and as such their GP Type is classed as unstated. Consequently, due to the change in the source information, figures for 2015 are not fully comparable with previous years, England's statistics are classed provisional experimental and care needs to be taken when interpreting these figures. Further information is available in the data quality section of "General and Personal Medical Services, England 2005-2015, as at 30 September, Provisional Experimental Statistics"¹

The wMDS collection includes details of GP Locums which have not been available in the previous data sources. 1,321 GP Locums headcount (537 FTE) were recorded as working in general practice in England as at 30 September 2015.¹

¹ <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/pubs/genpermssep15>

There were 634 GP Locums working in Wales as at 30 September 2015. Whilst data on GP Providers and GP Others in Wales was sourced from NHAIS, data on GP Locums is sourced from the Medical Performers List, which lists all GPs able to practice in Wales and is maintained by the NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership.¹

Currently, no figures for GP Locums are available for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

2. GP Trends in the UK

Table 1: GP trends in the UK

		2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010 ¹	2011 ¹	2012 ¹	2013 ¹	2014 ¹	2015 ²
A	Number of GP practices ³	10,347	10,212	10,145	10,112	10,096	10,185	10,158	9,912	9,777	9,674	9,458
B	Number of GP providers ^{1,2,3,4}	36,007	34,351	34,035	34,068	34,345	33,753	33,891	33,567	33,272	32,835	28,984
C	Number of other GPs ^{1,2,3,4}	3,715	5,857	6,596	7,273	8,958	9,013	9,354	9,663	9,981	10,765	11,089
D	GP registered patients (millions)	63.052	63.593	63.939	64.382	65.108	65.574	65.895	66.368	66.673	67.179	67.933
D/A	Average patients per practice ³	6,094	6,227	6,303	6,367	6,449	6,438	6,487	6,696	6,819	6,944	7,183
E	Residential population(millions) ⁵	60.413	60.827	61.319	61.824	62.261	62.760	63.285	63.705	64.106	64.597	65.110
E/A	Average population per practice ³	5,839	5,956	6,044	6,114	6,167	6,162	6,230	6,427	6,557	6,677	6,884

1. In England, the headcount methodology is not fully comparable with data for years prior to 2010 due to improvements that make it a more stringent count of absolute staff numbers. Headcount totals are unlikely to equal the sum of components. Further information on the headcount methodology is available in <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/pubs/genpermssep14>.

2. In England, prior to 2015 figures were sourced from NHAIS GP Payments (Exeter) System. From 2015 figures are sourced from the workforce Minimum Dataset (wMDS) and include estimates for missing data but exclude GPs where job role is unstated (3,228). Headcount is broadly comparable with previous years. Further information is available in <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/pubs/genpermssep15>

3. Due to country level changes these figures have been revised since previously published.

4. The sum of GPs Providers and Other GPs is not the total headcount or total number of GPs, as these tables exclude Registrars, Retainers and Locums.

5. U.K Population figures may not equal the sum of components due to rounding.

Table 2: GP trends in England

		2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010 ¹	2011 ¹	2012 ¹	2013 ¹	2014 ¹	2015 ²
A	Number of GP practices	8,451	8,325	8,261	8,230	8,228	8,324	8,316	8,088	7,962	7,875	7,674
B	Number of GP providers ^{1,2,3}	29,340	27,691	27,342	27,347	27,613	27,036	27,218	26,886	26,635	26,183	22,390
C	Number of other GPs ^{1,2,3}	3,398	5,400	6,022	6,663	8,304	8,319	8,585	8,898	9,153	9,885	10,063
D	GP registered patients (millions)	52.818	53.284	53.588	53.945	54.609	55.019	55.308	55.737	56.007	56.470	57.170
D/A	Average patients per practice	6,250	6,400	6,487	6,555	6,637	6,610	6,651	6,891	7,034	7,171	7,450
E	Residential population (millions)	50.606	50.965	51.381	51.816	52.196	52.643	53.107	53.494	53.866	54.317	54.786
E/A	Average population per practice	5,988	6,122	6,220	6,296	6,344	6,324	6,386	6,614	6,765	6,897	7,139

1. The headcount methodology is not fully comparable with data for years prior to 2010 due to improvements that make it a more stringent count of absolute staff numbers. Headcount totals are unlikely to equal the sum of components. Further information on the headcount methodology is available in <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/pubs/genpermssep14>.

2. In England, prior to 2015 figures were sourced from NHAIS GP Payments (Exeter) System. From 2015 figures are sourced from the workforce Minimum Dataset (wMDS) and include estimates for missing data but exclude GPs where job role is unstated (3,228). Headcount is broadly comparable with previous years. Further information is available in <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/pubs/genpermssep15>.

3. The sum of GP Providers and Other GPs is not the total headcount or total number of GPs, as these tables exclude Registrars, Retainers and Locums.

Table 3: GP trends in Wales

		2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
A	Number of GP practices	497	496	495	499	488	487	483	474	470	462	454
B	Number of GP providers ¹	1,819	1,778	1,778	1,788	1,768	1,776	1,757	1,753	1,740	1,722	1,663
C	Number of other GPs ¹	30	104	158	152	172	215	250	243	286	284	334
D	GP registered patients (millions)	3.052	3.093	3.094	3.115	3.135	3.153	3.163	3.173	3.178	3.173	3.187
D/A	Average patients per practice	6,140	6,236	6,250	6,242	6,424	6,474	6,549	6,694	6,762	6,868	7,021
E	Residential population (millions)	2.969	2.986	3.006	3.026	3.039	3.050	3.064	3.074	3.082	3.092	3.099
E/A	Average population per practice	5,974	6,020	6,073	6,064	6,227	6,263	6,343	6,485	6,558	6,693	6,826

1. The sum of GP Providers and Other GPs is not the total headcount or total number of GPs, as these tables exclude Registrars, Retainers and Locums.

Table 4: GP trends in Scotland

		2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
A	Number of GP practices ¹	1,035	1,028	1,027	1,025	1,023	1,019	1,006	997	994	987	981
B	Number of performer GPs ^{1,2}	3,764	3,772	3,787	3,785	3,808	3,781	3,753	3,758	3,726	3,719	3,657
C	Number of other GPs ^{1,2}	287	353	416	458	482	479	519	522	542	596	692
D	GP registered patients (millions)	5.388	5.406	5.424	5.474	5.497	5.519	5.527	5.549	5.568	5.599	5.627
D/A	Average patients per practice ¹	5,206	5,259	5,282	5,341	5,373	5,416	5,494	5,566	5,602	5,673	5,736
E	Residential population (millions)	5.110	5.133	5.170	5.203	5.232	5.262	5.300	5.314	5.328	5.348	5.373
E/A	Average population per practice ¹	4,937	4,993	5,034	5,076	5,114	5,164	5,268	5,330	5,360	5,418	5,477

1. These figures have been revised since previously published.

2. The sum of Performer GPs and Other GPs is not the total headcount or total number of GPs, as these tables exclude Registrars, Retainers and Locums.

Table 5: GP trends in Northern Ireland

		2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
A	Number of GP practices ¹	364	363	362	358	357	355	353	353	351	350	349
B	Number of GPs ²	1,084	1,110	1,128	1,148	1,156	1,160	1,163	1,170	1,171	1,211	1,274
C	Number of Other GPs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
D	GP registered patients (millions)	1.794	1.810	1.833	1.849	1.867	1.883	1.897	1.908	1.919	1.937	1.948
D/A	Average patients per practice	4,930	4,986	5,063	5,164	5,230	5,305	5,374	5,406	5,467	5,533	5,582
E	Residential population (millions)	1.728	1.743	1.762	1.779	1.793	1.805	1.814	1.824	1.830	1.841	1.852
E/A	Average population per practice	4,746	4,802	4,867	4,970	5,023	5,084	5,140	5,166	5,213	5,259	5,305

1. Number of GP Practices is not available directly from Northern Ireland Data. The Number of GP Practices is calculated from GP registered patients divided by the Average Practice List Size from www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/1804.html.

2. The number of GPs is not the total headcount or total number of GPs, as these tables exclude Registrars, Retainers and Locums.

3. Breakdown of Contract Types for England

The “General and Personal Medical Services, England - 2005-2015, as at 30 September, Provisional Experimental Statistics” (published in April 2016) report showed a breakdown of the number of practices and number of GP practitioners (Full Time Equivalent) by the various contract types. This is shown in table 6 and table 7.

Table 6: Contract type breakdown for GP Practices in England, 2009 to 2015

	2009 ¹	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
GP Practices	8,228	8,324	8,316	8,088	7,962	7,875	7,674
GMS	4,538	4,519	4,553	4,451	4,339	4,421	4,802
GMS administered by a limited company	16	19	28	7	6	7	6
PMS	3,397	3,393	3,316	3,270	3,197	3,143	2,584
PMS administered by a limited company	23	52	65	20	12	14	13
APMS	113	142	141	179	173	191	177
APMS administered by a limited company	60	120	135	81	98	99	92
PCTMS ²	66	79	78	80	137	.	.

1. Total number of GP practices contains some unknown contract values due to data not being available for a small number of practices at the time of the 2009 GP census publication.

2. PCTMS contracts ceased to exist following the April 2013 restructure of NHS commissioning organisations in England.

Table 7: Contract type breakdown for GP Practitioners (Full Time Equivalent) in England, 2009 to 2015

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014 ¹	2014 Estimate ¹	2015 ^{1,3}
Number of Practitioners (full time equivalent)²	32,111	31,356	31,391	31,578	32,075	32,628	30,251	29,271
GMS	16,289	16,071	16,225	16,285	16,510	17,319	16,299	15,902
PMS	14,502	14,346	14,194	14,296	14,396	14,548	13,283	9,685
APMS	326	641	689	708	710	761	669	372
PCTMS ⁴	143	188	161	181	404	.	.	.

1. Prior to 2015, contract and FTE figures were sourced from NHAIS GP Payments (Exeter) System. From 2015 figures are sourced from the workforce Minimum Dataset (wMDS). Figures from 2015 are not comparable with previous years. 2014 estimated figures have been provided to enable a comparison to 2015 based on the FTE reductions observed from 2015 NHAIS to 2015 PCWT.

2. Includes contracts administered by a Limited Company.

3. Figures are calculated from the 88.1% of GP practices providing a submission in the workforce Minimum Dataset (wMDS).

4. PCTMS contracts ceased to exist following the April 2013 restructure of NHS commissioning organisations in England

Due to the change in data source a contract type breakdown for GP Practitioners by role count, which has been presented in past GP Trends reports, is no longer available.

4. Data Sources

Population Figures

Population Estimates for UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, Mid-2015
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2015>

GP Workforce Figures

GP workforce information has been grouped according to the current definitions of GPs used by each individual country.

Health and Social Care Information Centre General and Personal Medical Services, England
<http://www.hscic.gov.uk/pubs/genpermssep15>

Welsh Government General Medical Practitioners in Wales
<http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/general-medical-practitioners/?lang=en>

Information Services Division Scotland, General Practice
<http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/General-Practice/>

Northern Ireland Business Services Organisation, General Medical Services
www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/1804.htm

Previous Reports

The “*General Practice Trends in the UK*” report from earlier years can be found at:

<http://www.hscic.gov.uk/article/2743/Technical-Steering-Committee-TSC-Archive>

and the archived website of the NHS Information Centre at:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120802111034/http://ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/supporting-information/primary-care/general-practice/technical-steering-committee-tsc>

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120802111034/http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/supporting-information/primary-care/general-practice/technical-steering-committee-tsc-archive>

5. Definition of GPs

England

GP Provider – GP practitioner, who may be a contracted and salaried partner, who has entered into a contract, to provide services to patients.

Other GPs – GPs that work within partnerships and were formerly known as GMS/PMS others. These practitioners are generally remunerated by salary.

GP Locum – GP practitioner who provide service sessions in general practice on a temporary and ad hoc basis. This group includes Locums – covering vacancy, Locums – covering sickness/maternity/paternity and Locums – other.

Definition of GP Contract Types in England

General Medical Services (GMS) is the contract under which most GPs are employed. It is a national agreement between the provider and NHS England which sets out the financial arrangements, the services to be provided and support arrangements.

Personal Medical Services (PMS) were first introduced in 1998. They allow the provider to negotiate a local agreement for the services they will provide and payments they will receive, taking into account specific local healthcare needs.

Alternative Provider Medical Services (APMS) and Primary Care Trust Medical Services (PCTMS):

APMS allow contracts to be bid for by the private, voluntary and public sectors. They offer greater flexibility in the nature of service provision which is decided in agreement between the provider and the commissioner.

PCTMS services are provided directly, as well as managed, by NHS England, enabling it therefore to employ health care professionals directly, perhaps as salaried staff, and provide primary medical services itself.

Wales

GP Provider – is a practitioner who has entered into a contract with a Local Health Board to provide services to patients.

Other GPs – GPs that work within partnerships and were formerly known as GMS Others. These practitioners are generally remunerated by salary.

GP Locum – GPs who deputises temporarily at a GP Practice, usually to cover for an absent GP Practitioner. Such cover should last for no more than 6 months.

Scotland

Performer – GP performers that are not salaried, i.e. generally the practice partners.

Other GPs – performer salaried GPs who are employed by the practice or NHS Board on a salaried basis.

Northern Ireland

Number of GPs – GPs that are practice partners.

For further information on historical reclassification and changes to definitions of GPs, please see previous versions of the GP Practice Trends report.

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This publication may be requested in large print or other formats.

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