



Patient safety and investment

The RCP's plan for the next government



This general election comes at a critical moment, with unanswered questions surrounding Brexit, and unfinished business for the health and social care system in England. The next UK government has **two major challenges** ahead of it.

Firstly, it must **place patient safety at the heart of Brexit negotiations**. As we have made clear, a no-deal exit from the EU could have a significant negative impact on the health and care system.

Secondly, the next government needs to finish what its predecessor started. We have an NHS Long Term Plan and a funding settlement for service delivery, but without **investment in the health and care workforce, public health and prevention, a capital programme and social care provision**, the long term plan simply won't be delivered. The next government must also ensure that all the UK nations have the resources to deliver health and care systems which meet the needs of the populations they serve.

The RCP calls on the government to place patient safety and protecting the nation's health at the heart of Brexit negotiations by:

- > creating an immigration system and environment which welcome the skills and talents of people from overseas who want to work in our health and care system
 - > ensuring the UK's exit from the EU does not negatively impact patients' ability to participate in and benefit from high-quality research, particularly with regard to funding
 - > delivering continued collaboration on drug regulation between the European Medicines Agency and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency to ensure that patients do not experience delays accessing treatments and industry continues to conduct research in the UK
 - > providing protection for the NHS in any new trade agreements post Brexit.
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Workforce

NHS trusts in England reported over 100,000 vacancies during 2017/18,¹ which demonstrates the lack of emphasis successive governments have put on making NHS and social care workforces sustainable. The next government needs to dramatically increase the number of medical and nursing students, and better support efforts to retain current staff.

The RCP calls on the government to commit the resources towards and develop an ambitious NHS People Plan, which includes:

- > a doubling of the number of medical school places
- > the regulation of physician associates and a commitment to consulting on their future prescribing rights
- > creative 'retire and return' programmes
- > an increase in international recruitment, including the expansion of the Medical Training Initiative
- > a focused programme of culture change to make the NHS a more modern, flexible employer
- > making staff health and wellbeing a national priority
- > protected time for all clinicians to pursue professional development opportunities, including research and quality improvement
- > the creation a funding package which will dramatically increase the number of nursing students in higher education.

Population health

With life expectancy differing by almost 20 years between the richest and most deprived areas in the UK,² the next government must ensure that every department fully understands the part it must play in reducing health inequalities. It must rapidly increase the resources available to develop targeted interventions which support people to live healthier lives.

We must also begin to prepare for the growing role genomic medicine will play in the years ahead. It is key

that we create a regulatory system which supports this growth. The next government must also grasp the major health threats associated with antimicrobial resistance and climate change – we are already on the back foot and only concerted action will help to turn the tide.

The RCP calls on the next UK government to begin to address health inequalities by:

- > increasing the resources allocated to develop public health and prevention services via a multi-year funding settlement
- > supporting research that aims to reduce health inequalities, including on the environmental determinants of health, place-based approaches, and early life and health
- > delivering evidence-based interventions which reduce obesity and smoking rates, reduce harm from alcohol, and improve the quality of the air we breathe
- > commissioning an urgent cross-government review into the reduction in UK life expectancy
- > recognising obesity as a disease
- > funding a national network of clean air zones and enshrining in legislation World Health Organization (WHO) air quality standards
- > creating a regulatory body similar to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) to oversee genomic testing in the UK
- > continuing to view antimicrobial resistance as one of the major health threats of our time, ensuring support for international collaborative research in the area.

Infrastructure

Patients and the NHS workforce continually tell us that too many NHS trusts' estates and facilities are not fit for purpose. The recent NHS Providers' report *Rebuild our NHS* lays bare the scale of the challenge which we must now overcome.³

We must also set up the NHS to be able to adapt to innovative technologies that will enable patients to take more control over their health. To do this we need to ensure that the basic questions over resourcing and IT systems are addressed.

The RCP calls on the next government to revitalise NHS infrastructure by:

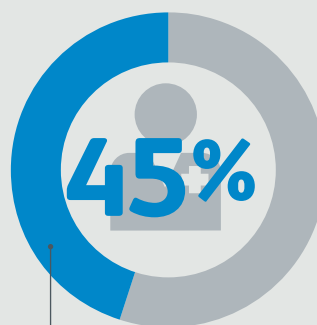
- > committing to an ambitious multi-year NHS capital funding settlement
- > working with clinicians to understand what technological changes will make the most difference to their ability to provide high-quality care and implement them as soon as possible, while ensuring that any new initiatives are evidence-based
- > focus the development of AI tools on those tasks that take doctors away from time with their patients
- > ensuring basic IT infrastructure in hospitals is sound and interoperable, including an initial focus on the use of technology to support the flexible delivery of care, such as video conferencing facilities.

Social care

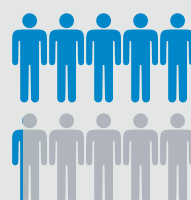
Our members continue to tell us that overstretched and inconsistent social care provision inhibits their efforts to manage demand and impacts profoundly on the wellbeing of patients. Social care plays a vital role in supporting individuals to maximise their wellbeing, independence and health. The next government must give social care parity of esteem with healthcare and reverse the years of underfunding.

The RCP calls on the government to immediately place social care on a sustainable footing by:

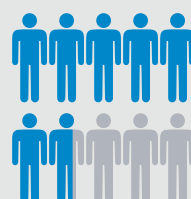
- > providing a new financial settlement for social care which meets the current and future needs of an ageing population
- > ensuring that any future immigration system supports social care providers to recruit internationally.



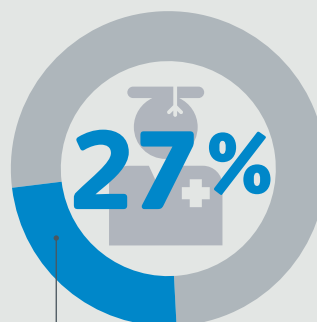
45% of advertised consultant posts went unfilled due to a lack of suitable applicants



53% of consultants and



68% of trainees said rota gaps occurred frequently or often



27% of trainees said that if they could turn back time, they would take a medical job outside the NHS



13 years – the minimum journey from medical student to consultant

References

- 1 NHS Improvement. *Performance of the NHS provider sector for the quarter ended 31 December 2018*. London: NHS Improvement, 2018. https://improvement.nhs.uk/documents/4942/Performance_of_the_NHS_provider_sector_for_the_quarter_ended_31_Dec_2018.pdf [Accessed 13 September 2019].
- 2 Longevity Science Panel. *Life expectancy: Is the socioeconomic gap narrowing?* Longevity Science Panel, 2018. www.longevitypanel.co.uk/_files/LSP_Report.pdf [Accessed 13 September 2019].
- 3 NHS Providers. *Rebuild our NHS*. London: NHS Providers, 2019. <https://nhsproviders.org/rebuild-our-nhs> [Accessed 13 September 2019].
- 4 Royal College of Physicians. *Focus on physicians. Census of consultant physicians and higher specialty trainees 2017–18*. London: RCP, 2018.

About the RCP

The RCP plays a leading role in the delivery of high-quality patient care by setting standards of medical practice and promoting clinical excellence.

We provide physicians in the UK and overseas with education, training and support throughout their careers. As an independent body representing nearly 36,000 fellows and members worldwide, we advise and work with government, the public, patients and other professions to improve health and healthcare.

Our primary interest is in building a health system that delivers high-quality care for patients.

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