

**Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP**

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
Department of Health and Social Care

**Sent via email**

09 September 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

**Re: Supporting primary care**

As organisations representing general practice and primary care, we write to express our grave concern with the lack of central support, or public challenge by government, of increasing instances of abuse being directed towards those working in general practice and the misinformation on how they are delivering their services for patients.

GPs, Practice Managers, and other primary care professionals share patients' frustrations when they face long delays for an appointment or long waiting times to get through to their surgery. But it is important to remember that we are all on the same side and all want to ensure high-quality care is delivered when needed.

A [recent BMA survey](#) revealed that two-thirds of GPs (67%) said their experience of abuse, threatening behaviour or violence had got worse in the last year, with half (51%) saying they had been personally verbally abused in the past month alone.

A similar survey by The Institute of General Practice Management found:

- 75% of GP staff experienced abuse from patients on a daily basis, and 13% at least once a week.
- 78% reported that the abuse experienced is a combination of threatening behaviour, racist abuse, and sexist abuse.
- 63% said they have had to call the police because of abusive behaviour towards staff
- 83% have removed a patient because of multiple incidents of abuse towards their team<sup>1</sup>.

This situation would be indefensible under normal circumstances but following the COVID-19 crisis, and with many primary care teams at breaking point, we fear the damage could be irreversible, as more frontline workers consider their future within the profession. A recent RCGP survey found that the sector may lose up to 3,500 GPs over the next year, and up to 16,000 over the next five<sup>2</sup>, many of these in the early stages of their careers – a huge blow in the context of a workforce crisis and pandemic patient backlog. Without action, this crisis does not look set to change, the same survey found six in ten GPs expecting the situation to worsen over the next year and the same proportion

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<sup>1</sup> IGPM survey, Abuse of our front-line staff, May 2021 (available on request)

<sup>2</sup> Royal College of General Practitioners, 2021 Tracking Survey, 1280 responses from GPs

reporting a decline in their mental health and wellbeing over the past year. This trend needs to be broken.

The NHS Confederation's PCN and primary care federation members are clear that we will not deliver the ambition of PCNs to improve population health and reduce health inequalities if the fundamental building blocks of general practice are not effectively supported.

Primary care staff have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic. They have been proud to support their patients during the greatest challenge in a generation, administering the majority of vaccinations, reaching out to underserved communities and making headway against their objective to tackle health inequalities, remaining open and delivering record numbers of consultations, the majority face to face. They go into this line of work to care for patients, and it is no surprise to us that in the recent National Patient Survey 83% of patients rated their overall experience of their GP practice as good.

Given this dedication and the sacrifices made to keep practices and broader primary care services running, by adapting quickly to new ways of working, staff deserve the overt and public support of government to carry on doing what they do best – delivering much needed high quality care to patients. Currently, they are being repeatedly attacked, insulted and scapegoated across the media. This situation has been further impacted by the national blood tube shortage resulting in GPs facing criticism for postponing blood tests, even though the situation is beyond their control and under national guidance.

This situation is not acceptable. We call on you to publicly support and defend dedicated GPs and primary care staff against this onslaught of misinformation and abuse promoted by the media. It is essential that patient care is protected by looking after the hardworking primary care teams who provide care. We believe that there must be accurate, timely and regular communications from the government to the public, which reflect the realities of the situation and what is being done to address the challenges facing the NHS, and particularly relating to general practice.

The primary care workforce has become increasingly demoralised by the current situation and we risk losing many of them, which would make matters even worse. The pandemic has created a backlog of care previously unimaginable, with the recent blood tube shortage also contributing significantly, and yet practices have been given no support to compensate for this. Many patients have benefitted from the new ways of working rapidly implemented by general practice and yet government have not acknowledged this.

We hope to meet with you to discuss these concerns in more detail, and to work together to ensure that primary care is fully supported to meet the needs of patients, as we face these new and growing challenges.

Yours sincerely

PD

**Richard Vautrey**, Chair, BMA General Practitioners Committee

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