

Being a GP is too stressful to do full time, say trainees

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Only one in ten trainee GPs wants to work full time, according to a survey that raises fresh fears of a shortage of doctors. The average family doctor-in-training wants to work three days a week, saying the job is too intense to do a full five days.

Waiting times are already lengthening and health chiefs fear that a national GP shortage will be worsened as younger adults shun the long-hours culture of previous generations.

One in five junior doctors training to be GPs also says they do not expect still to be working in the NHS in five years, according to a survey by *Pulse* magazine of 310 trainees. Doctors are planning either to move aboard or to change career, according to figures that cast further doubt on government pledges to recruit 5,000 extra GPs by 2020.

Officials are trying to recruit 2,000 doctors from abroad after numbers in the NHS dipped despite rising demand from an older, sicker population.

Simon Stevens, head of NHS England, has pointed to an increase in GP trainees as an encouraging sign, but only one in ten surveyed wanted to work the eight half-day sessions considered full time, with a further tenth willing to work seven sessions.

Zoe Greaves, a GP trainee in north-east England, said: "I enjoy clinical work, but have seen colleagues burn out doing it five days a week. I feel more challenged and engaged with my work when I have variety to my week."

However, Joyce Robins of Patient Concern, said: "Doctors work hard, but no harder than an awful lot of other people. I don't see why they should be able to cut their hours when patients need them. That is why we train them at vast expense to the taxpayer."

Helen Stokes-Lampard, chairwoman of the Royal College of GPs, insisted that flexible working was a strength. She said: "Far from contributing to a shortage in GPs, it's often what makes it possible for family doctors to remain in the workforce."

Ian Cumming, chief executive of the training body Health Education England told NHS managers in June that younger doctors were spending 10 per cent less time seeing their patients, increasing pressure on remaining staff.