

Report to Health Scrutiny Committee

Access to General Practice

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Purpose of the Report

This report is to inform Health Scrutiny Committee of the current position in respect of access to General Practice in Oldham.

Executive Summary

The report presents the national and local context in respect of access to General Practice and provides locality data and actions that are being taken.

Recommendations

The Health Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the contents of the report.

Access to General Practice

1 Background

1.1 National and Local Context

“GP practices across the country are experiencing significant and growing strain with declining GP numbers, rising demand, struggles to recruit and retain staff and knock-on effects for patients.

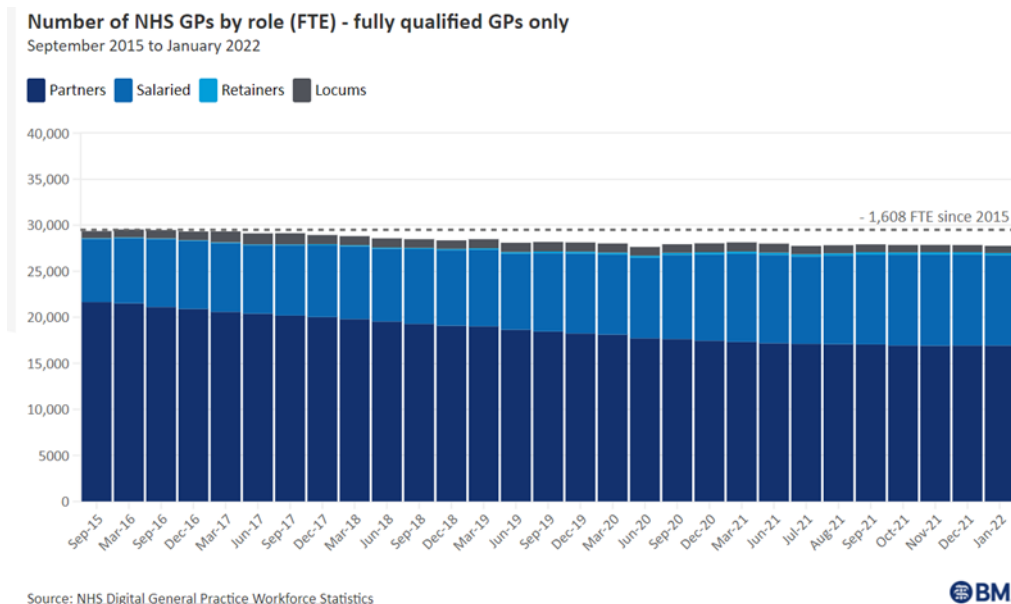
They have been at the forefront of the NHS's response to the COVID-19 outbreak, delivering vaccines whilst maintaining non-COVID care for patients throughout.”

British Medical Association (January 2022)

England has a shortage of GPs

In 2017, there were 143 GPs, excluding locums and trainee doctors, in Oldham, working across 44 practices. According to the latest NHS Digital data¹, there are currently 140 GPs working across 39 practices. This data reflects the national picture of a stagnation in the growth of the number of GPs since 2015.

This has been a national issue for some time and in February 2020 the Government announced a drive to recruit an additional 6,000 GPs by 2024. Unfortunately, these initiatives have not yet had the desired impact on increasing the number of qualified GPs – in fact, numbers continue to decline nationally.

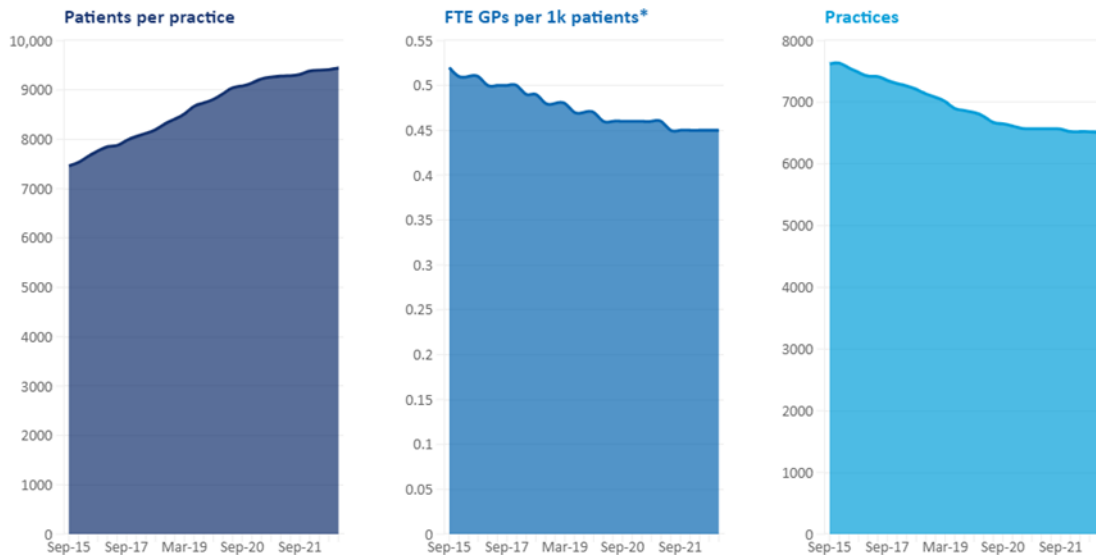


1 <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/nhs-delivery-and-workforce/pressures/pressures-in-general-practice-data-analysis>

2 NHS Digital (<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/general-and-personal-medical-services/31-january-2022>)

In the same period, the number of patients registered with a practice in Oldham has increased from 246,039 to 262,400. Again, this trend is reflected nationally, as shown below in the BMA study.

Change in average number of patients per practice and GP to patient ratio
September 2015 to January 2022



Source: BMA analysis of NHS Digital General Practice Workforce Statistics • * Fully qualified GPs



There are now just 0.45 fully qualified GPs per 1,000 patients in England – down from 0.52 in 2015. For the GPs that remain, this means increasing numbers of patients to take care of. The average number of patients each GP is responsible for has increased by around 300 – or 16% - since 2015.

At the same time, the number of practices is also falling. While many practices have entered into mergers, practices can also be closed for other reasons. For example, inability to recruit staff or GP partners, no longer viable, partner retirements or CQC closures due to under resourcing.

British Medical Association (January 2022)²

The picture painted by the BMA above is true in Oldham: the number of practices has decreased by an average of one practice per year over the last five years. However, in Oldham there are 0.53 fully qualified GPs per 1,000 patients (excluding trainees and locums), which is above the national average of 0.45.

Although the number of patients has increased, and the number of GPs has broadly stayed the same, general practice appointment bookings have reached a record high in the last few months. Nationally, there were half a million more appointments in

² <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/nhs-delivery-and-workforce/pressures/pressures-in-general-practice-data-analysis>

January 2022, compared to January 2020. In the same period, GP appointments in Oldham increased by 16% from 50,477 to 58,601.

In recent years, there have been a number of national objectives aimed at increasing both the number of staff in general practice and the variety of roles. The emphasis on workforce has begun to shift to ensure that patients see the right person in the right place, first time. During the pandemic, patients will have seen a move by practices towards “triage systems” which helps direct them to the most appropriate clinical professional to meet their needs. There has also been an un-precedented increase in the use of digital systems and remote consultations. As we have moved out of the pandemic practices have retained this technology and ‘digital first’ as an option although patients should now be triaged first and offered a face to face or digital appointment as appropriate.

An important fact to consider when looking at the number of GPs working at particular practices is that different providers use different staffing models: there is no mandated workforce model for general practice and providers can choose the blend of staff which they think will best meet the needs of their patients. Whilst GPs continue to be the pivot point for practices, the roles carried out by nurses, pharmacists, healthcare support workers and other clinical professionals are just as vital. High quality care depends on all of these roles, underpinned by the inestimable contribution of the practice administrative staff.

2 **Current Position**

2.1 Enhanced Access

From 1 October 2022, Primary Care Networks (PCNs) have been required to provide Enhanced Access between the hours of 6.30pm and 8pm Mondays to Fridays and between 9am and 5pm on Saturdays (“Network Standard Hours”), in accordance with the requirements set out in the Primary Care Network Direct Enhanced Service (DES) Specification.

The Primary Care Networks in Oldham succeeded in mobilising the Enhanced Access service in their networks by 1st October 2022. Whilst national IT, estates and workforce situations have created issues, the PCNs have managed to provide workarounds to these and delivered against the requirements of the Primary Care Network Direct Enhanced Service Specification.

Where improvements are required, the Commissioner is working with the PCNs to continue to improve service delivery and patient experience to ensure that the best outcomes are met.

2.2 GP Appointment Data

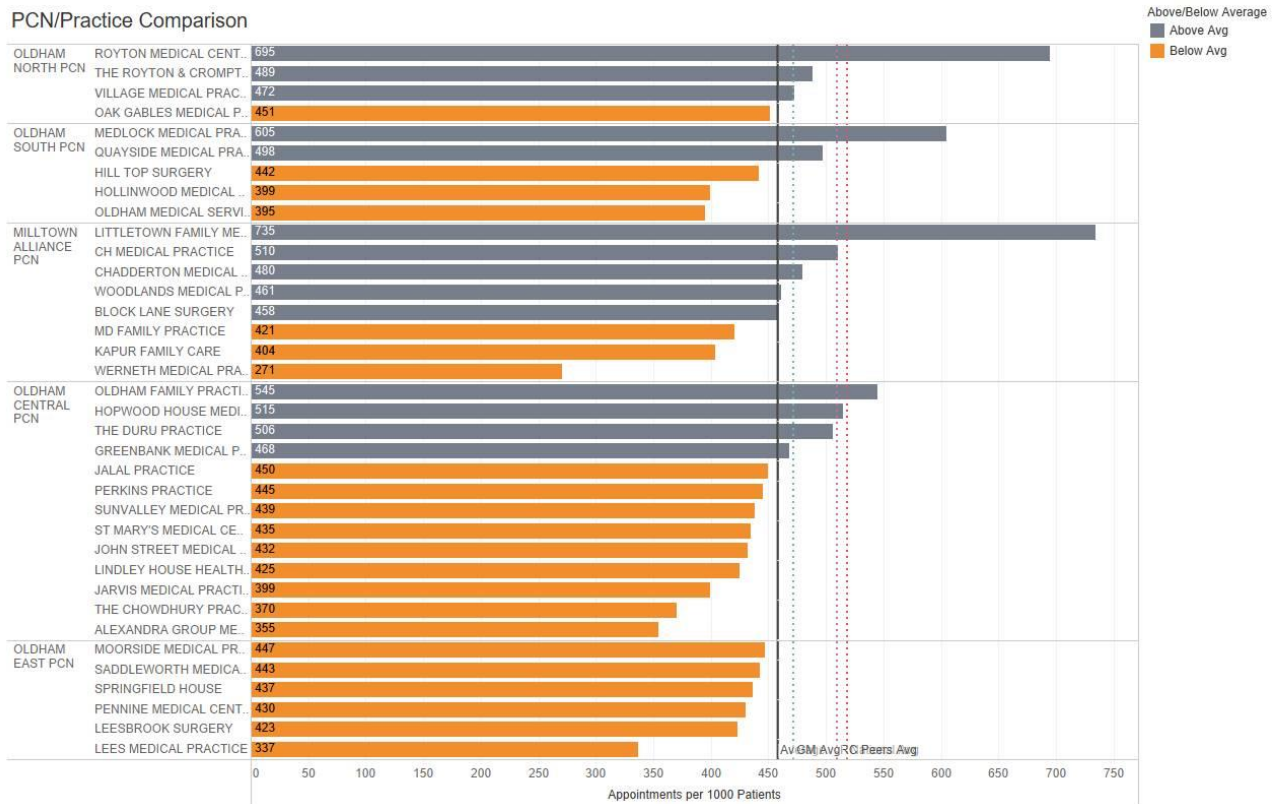
NHS Digital has been collecting data from general practice appointment systems and publishing local monthly data, since 2018. This published data provides a picture of general practice appointments and includes details such as the number of appointments, the healthcare professional carrying them out and where possible the mode of delivery e.g. face to face, telephone. Historically this has only been available at locality level.

On Thursday (24 November), NHS Digital published practice level data for the first time as laid out in the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care’s “Our Plan for Patients”. The

aim is that patients will have more information available to choose the right practice for them.

Oldham data is detailed below:

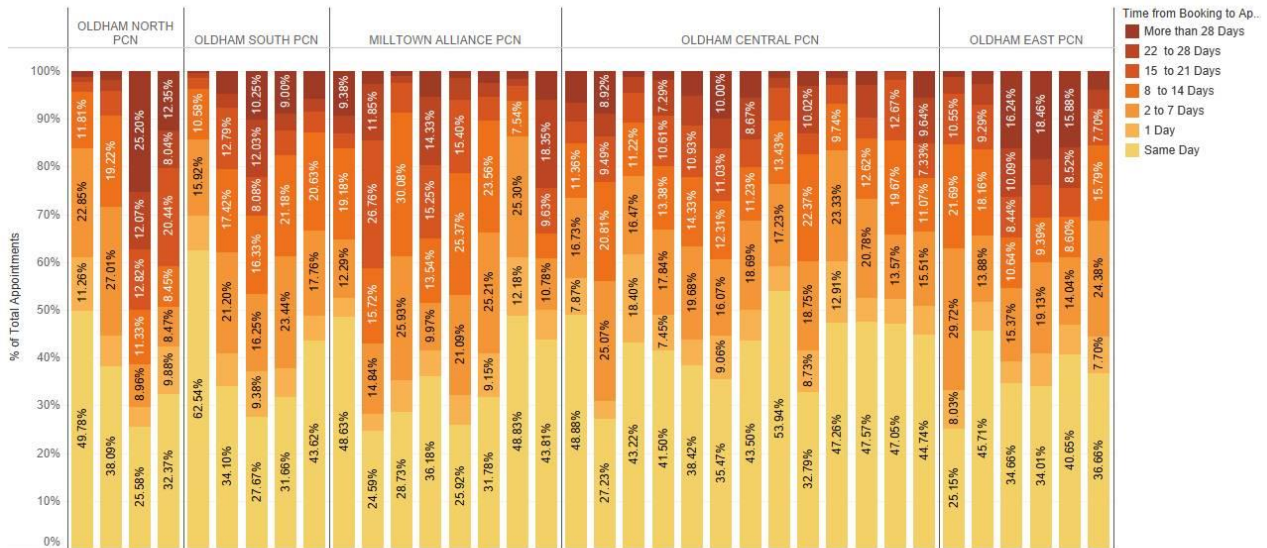
Appointments per 1000 patients



There is no contractually mandated workforce model or minimum appointment numbers for general practice and providers can choose the blend of staff which they think will best meet the needs of their patients.

Time from booking to appointment and appointment mode

PCN/Practice Time from Booking to Appointment



PCN/Practice % Appointment Type



Time from booking to appointment.

The data shows that the majority of patients are seen in General Practice within a week of booking their appointment with most patients being seen on the day of booking. The data cannot be broken down to show why the appointment was booked, however, you would expect those with an more acute need to be seen quicker. It is appropriate for appointments for a pre-booked review or long term condition management review or due to patient choice to be booked in advance.

Appointment Type

The vast majority of appointments in general practice post pandemic are now conducted face to face. It is normal practice to triage patients over the phone in advance before booking an appointment.

3 Key Questions for Health Scrutiny to Consider

3.1 Actions being taken

Greater Manchester Integrated Care - Oldham Locality will continue to work with practices to address these issues outlined above. In the last 12 months, we have invested £42k in a

scheme which focuses on providing GP trainees with the knowledge and skills to work in areas of disadvantage within the locality. Trainees will be encouraged to continue working in the areas in which they train, with aim of improving the availability and quality of healthcare in those areas and reduce health inequalities.

The number of GP training practices in Oldham has increased in recent years, with more practices now offering placements for doctors as they complete the training to become GPs. We are also working with newly qualified GPs to support them as they begin their post-qualification careers, setting up a peer network that can help ease the transition from trainee to GP.

Greater Manchester Integrated Care - Oldham Locality will continue to invest significant money and resources in 2022/23 into improving the rates of GP retention and recruitment in the short- and long-term.

A significant piece of work is currently being undertaken to address historic telephony issues and we are hopeful that we can provide a technical solution that will improve the experience for patients of booking an appointment with their practice.

Historically, appointments have always been booked via telephone and in-person. However, post-pandemic, an increasing number of practices are using online triage and this has had a positive impact on both access and waiting times. The Oldham Locality has invested in a new triage platform which can reduce telephone demand for patients and make it easier for those patients who would rather call their practice. We will be looking to support practices to adopt this system.

The impact of Covid meant that there were staff shortages during the pandemic, and the recent increased in cases continues to impact on GP practices, although the most recent data shows that their resilience is high and there has been continuous service throughout the last two years. We monitor these staff absences and support practices to alleviate any staffing issues that arise.

4 Links to Corporate Outcomes

4.1 Healthy, safe and well-supported residents

5 Conclusion

5.1 Increasing demands on general practice – not just a heavier workload but the increasing complexity and intensity of work has led to challenges. The NHS is finding it difficult to recruit and retain full-time GPs and patients report difficulties in accessing care.

General Practice appointment data only reflects a proportion of the work conducted in General Practice. Referrals, medication reviews and repeat prescriptions, medical reports and conversations with other professions about a patients care for example are not reflected in this data.

Opportunities do exist to support continuity while delivering improved access through service design, reshaping the workforce, and technology. There are many examples in this report describing what the Oldham locality is doing. Patients and professionals need to help shape these initiatives and determine the appropriate balance between access and continuity. The introduction of Primary Care Networks has begun to transform the way

patients can access and is encouraging GPs to group together and deliver care at scale. In the coming months the locality will continue to embed and build upon these relationships and learning.