

September 2021
[firstname.surname].mp@parliament.uk

Dear [MP name]

Urgent – Abuse of General Practice staff in [constituency]

I write on behalf of GP practices in [constituency] to ask for your support in countering the growing anti-GP sentiment being experienced by GPs and practice staff. As the representative body, we are increasingly worried about the volume of abuse which GPs and our teams are being subjected to on a daily basis, and the mental and physical effect of that abuse.

Much of our work of general practice goes unseen and the majority of Londoners have been fantastic in their support for their local GPs, but abuse is growing among a minority. Whilst I imagine that much of this will be all too familiar to your own staff team, London practice staff are receiving profanity filled messages and verbal abuse/threats. Sadly, this recently escalated to the physical assaults of GPs and their receptionists, resulting in broken bones and hospitalisation.

We need your urgent help to communicate that general practice is working as hard as it can, and that those on the other side of the reception desk, the consulting room or at the end of the phone are people, not a faceless sounding board for frustrations.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING WITH HOSPITALS :

The ongoing pandemic and the aftermath of the past 18 months has impacted on the entire NHS system from hospitals to general practice and added to pre-existing workforce and workload challenges in general practice in [constituency] and the Capital. It is understandable that hospitals must prioritise urgent care, and therefore some investigations and referrals may be delayed. There are backlogs in care across the system. However, GPs are inappropriately being held responsible for some of these delays, not helped by negative media messaging, which is creating inappropriate expectations of general practice from the public.

ACCESS TO GENERAL PRACTICE :

In response to demands from NHS England and with patient and staff safety in mind, we had to change the way we consult; but London general practice remains fully, and safely, open. The number of GP appointments in London has increased. In June 2019 London GP appointments stood at 3.1 million, in June 2021 this had increased by 27% to 4 million, despite practices carrying significant vacancies and London having 60 fewer GP practices. Whilst part of the latter may be accounted for by mergers, other practices will have simply closed.

PATIENT SAFETY :

GPs and practice teams were already practising at the limits of patient safety even before the pandemic due to longstanding disparities between supply and demand, and workload and workforce. The resulting conflict and disconnection from the realities of the pandemic is undermining confidence and trust amongst some patients, and morale and resilience amongst practitioners. Each six months we survey London general practice about their workforce challenges, staff vacancies, retiring GPs, and workload. In our Summer 2021 survey, four out of five reported that staff wellbeing and patient satisfaction are both being impacted by current levels of demand, and over a third expressed concerns about their ability to continue to provide safe patient care.

NEXT STEPS :

We want to thank patients for their support in helping practices to prioritise those who are most in need. We need unambiguous communication to the public by local and national leaders to ensure that patients and communities have a clear understanding and expectation of what services can be offered and how best to access them. We will continue to prioritise meeting essential need through

diagnosing/treating serious illness, whilst maintaining other essential services such as long-term condition management and childhood vaccinations.

I would be grateful for the opportunity to further discuss the current working environment and safety of GPs and their practice teams.

If you would like to find out more about the work general practice has been doing in [constituency], I would be happy to arrange an opportunity for you to hear directly from London GPs, practice managers, and nurses in your area, to get the view from the front line. Or even to spend some time within a practice. Please contact Londonwide LMCs' Communications Director Sam Dowling at sam.dowling@lmc.org.uk to arrange a convenient time to speak. And I am always available to discuss pan-London issues affecting the profession, our practices, and our patients.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa', with a stylized flourish above the first letter.

Dr Lisa Harrod-Rothwell

Deputy Chief Executive, Londonwide LMCs

ANNEX – DATA LINKS

London GP appointments June 2021 – 3,993,157

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/appointments-in-general-practice/june-2021>

London GP appointments June 2020 – 2,914, 673

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/appointments-in-general-practice/june-2020>

London GP appointments June 2019 – 3,139,253

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/appointments-in-general-practice/june-2019>

NOTE: Over the same period the figures show that there are 60 fewer GP practices open. Some loss could be accounted for by mergers, but other practices will have simply closed.