

Audit scope

NHS workforce planning – part 2

The primary care clinical workforce



AUDITOR GENERAL 

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Background

Primary care is usually an individual's first point of contact with the NHS, and refers to services provided in either clinics and GP practices or in a patient's home. It is provided by generalist health professionals, such as General Practitioners (GPs), nurses and pharmacists. Primary care is central to the delivery of effective health and social care and has a major role to play in achieving the Scottish Government's aim for more care to be delivered at home, or closer to home.

NHS workforce planning in Scotland is changing and becoming more complex. Alongside the traditional

role of NHS Boards and the Scottish Government in planning the clinical primary care workforce, integration authorities and regional planning groups have a growing role to play.

The role of the GP within clinical workforce teams is also changing. From April 2018, a new GP contract was implemented, setting out how the wider clinical team will work differently in the community, freeing time for GPs to deliver more complex care. From July 2018, integration authorities were required to produce Primary Care Improvement Plans, which will set out the funding and timescales for how primary care services will change.

Why is this audit important?

In July 2017, the Auditor General published the first in a series of audits on NHS workforce planning.

That report focused on clinical staff in a hospital setting and concluded that:

- the Scottish Government and NHS Boards have not effectively planned for the long-term
- responsibility for NHS workforce planning was confused
- there was a risk of further fragmentation as health and social care planning and planning for specialist centres develops.

It found that NHS staff are raising concerns about workload, and NHS services are under increasing pressure. The Scottish Government expects demand for health and social care to rise but is yet to project fully how this will impact on the skills and workforce numbers needed to meet this demand.

The second audit in this series will look at the pressures affecting the primary care clinical workforce, with a focus on General Practitioners and wider multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs), including nurses, pharmacists and allied health professionals. It will also consider progress since our initial recommendations were made.

The Scottish Government is committed to shifting the balance of care from hospital settings to the community. Effective and joined-up planning of the NHS primary care workforce is needed.

The Scottish Government has published a three-part National Health and Social Care workforce plan. The third part of the plan, published in April 2018, considers how primary care workforce arrangements will change. The creation and expansion of multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) working with GP practices is central to the Scottish Government's approach. MDTs are groups of different types of primary care professionals, such as GPs, nurses, pharmacists and allied health professionals (such as paramedics, occupational therapists and physiotherapists), working together to deliver healthcare.

What the audit will look at

This audit will look primarily at the national approach to workforce planning. It will consider how effectively the Scottish Government is planning and developing the primary care clinical workforce to meet the current and future needs of the Scottish population. The audit will

focus on GPs and the wider multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs), as they are central to shifting the balance of care to community settings. It will not cover the wider social care workforce. It will look at current and future pressures facing the NHS workforce, as well as progress in implementing new ways of working.

Specific audit questions are:

- How effectively is national workforce planning for the primary care clinical workforce addressing current pressures on staff and patient care?
- How well are national primary care clinical workforce planning arrangements considering the future needs of the Scottish population?
- What are the anticipated workforce costs to meet demand for primary care services and how effectively are these being planned for?
- What impact will the new GP contract have on the Scottish Government's ability to deliver its vision of primary care?

This audit will focus on the NHS clinical workforce, but the report will be informed by relevant findings from our wider programme of work. Related recent and upcoming reports include Changing models of health and social care, a series of work on health and social care integration and our annual NHS in Scotland publication.

How we will carry out the audit

We will gather evidence using a range of methods, including:

- reviewing documents including workforce plans, primary care improvement plans, national workforce plans, and the General Medical Services Contract in Scotland;
- analysing workforce data, including current workforce numbers and vacancy rates, NHS board accounts data and surveys carried out with patients and members of the NHS workforce;
- interviewing a range of stakeholders, including the Scottish Government, NHS boards, integration authorities and bodies representing the NHS workforce, such as the British Medical Association, the Royal College of General Practitioners and the Royal College of Nursing.

What impact will the audit have?

The audit will assess progress against the strategic objectives for primary care and how this aligns with wider health and social care policy objectives. We will make recommendations to the Scottish Government on areas for improvement. We will also report on examples of good practice.

Audit timetable

We aim to publish our report in August 2019. Following publication, the Auditor General for Scotland will present the findings to the Scottish Parliament's Public Audit and Post-Legislative Scrutiny Committee. This is one of a range of reports Audit Scotland plans to publish in 2019. Our full [rolling work programme](#)  can be accessed on our website.

Contact

If you would like to get in touch to discuss any of the issues that will be covered in this audit, please contact Dharshi Santhakumaran, Audit Manager, on 0131 625 1729 or by email at dsanthakumaran@audit-scotland.gov.uk .



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