

■ ■ ■ A new, sustainable model of care for general practice

# Could nurse-led general practice solve the GP workforce crisis?

There has been much discussion about Jeremy Hunt's suggestion that hospital consultants need to adhere to seven-day working. This mirrors the Prime Minister's proposal for seven-day working for general practice offering extended opening hours across the country — an initiative for hard-working people to be able to see their GP seven days a week.

General practice partners are already tired and stretched to their limits as bureaucratic paperwork lands in their in boxes on a continuous basis. Many local GP practices have formed local groups or federations to deliver the out-of-hospital contracts, leading to yet more change in systems and processes for practices to grapple with. We already know that there is a GP workforce crisis in England. The report, *Securing the Future GP Workforce*, highlighted that the crisis 'must be addressed immediately' and that 'evidence is also emerging that the GP workforce is now shrinking rather than growing' (Health Education England [HEE], 2014). The constant changes and additional workload is not an enticing factor in recruiting suitable candidates to work as GPs.

With this in mind, general practice needs to look at other models of care that might be able to support the diminishing workforce. A useful and potentially successful model could be

to increase the number of nurse-led general practices. One such model in Ealing has proven both to be popular and to exceed targets set by the Government. Cuckoo Lane Health Care has been running as a totally nurse-

led general practice for the last 10 years, when it became open to tender as both existing GP partners retired. The practice presented a bid alongside ten other bids and was accepted as an alternative provider of medical services (APM) to provide primary medical services for the local population. The practice currently looks after 4,800 patients and has grown from strength to strength since its inception. Led by two nurse practitioners, it is one of only two practices awarded 'outstanding' Care Quality Commission (CQC) status in the recent round of CQC inspections.

The practice aims to provide high quality personal health care to the registered population through developing and maintaining a happy multidisciplinary practice, which is responsive to people's needs and expectations, reflecting, where possible, latest advances in primary health care. The practice is committed to continuous improvement through communication, as well as ongoing education and training, creating a motivated and skilled workforce, and spearheads innovation both clinically and organisationally. Currently, Cuckoo Lane Health Care is one of three pilot practices for whole system integrated care, which aims to join up social, health and voluntary care to create integrated plans of care for patients.

It might be argued that patients would not be satisfied with a nurse-led practice. However, at the time of writing, 100% of the patients who completed a friends and family questionnaire at Cuckoo Lane said that they were extremely likely or likely to recommend the practice to friends and family if they need similar care or treatment.

Indeed, comments received from patients included: 'clinicians are friendly

and easy to talk to'; 'staff are very caring, 'all the staff are excellent listeners'; 'reception staff are very helpful'; 'there is a wealth of experience and nothing is too much trouble. I am very lucky to be registered here'.

Others may question if staff are happy to work in such a nurse-led service? However, when questioned, staff at Cuckoo Lane said: 'great communication among the team'; 'do not have to wait for a week to get an answer, action straight away'; 'open dialogue to solve issues — always striving for excellence'; 'feel valued by employer - fully acknowledged as a team member'.

It should be stressed that this type of model is not to provide a cheaper workforce, but one that mirrors other high quality primary care services, providing the same type of health care but through a different model. Nurse-led general practice has been seen not only to be safe and effective in the care given, but also to exceed parameters set out within the APMS contract, such as caring for people with long-term conditions, families and young children, as well as working with mental health services around shifting the settings of care to keep patients supported in primary care.

The practice at Cuckoo Lane believes that this model is sustainable, as it has successfully run for ten years with good staff retention and low sickness records, and equals or exceeds targets of national and local quality markers when benchmarked against other GP practices, and that it can be replicated in other areas with appropriate support, leadership and a learning environment. **GPN**

## REFERENCE

Health Education England (2014) *Securing the Future GP Workforce. Delivering the Mandate on GP Expansion*. HEE, London



Julie Belton, strategic and operational director, Cuckoo Lane Health Care