

17 December 2020

GP Practice Workload and Activity

The Scottish Government, NHS Boards, Health & Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs), Royal College of General Practitioners Scotland (RCGP Scotland), and Scottish General Practitioners Committee of the BMA (SGPC) collectively acknowledge and are grateful for the work undertaken by all staff members in General Practice over the past year. We have tackled COVID-19 in our communities, as well as continuing to keep patients safe and well by treating non-COVID-19 conditions, helping to support those patients who were shielding and coping with other health concerns. For many, this will have involved working longer hours, in different ways and with increased uncertainty. We are thankful for your efforts.

We are writing to you today regarding the winter period, and ongoing concerns around General Practice workload.

As we move through winter – a traditionally busy period for our health system – there are concerns that COVID-19 and an expanded flu vaccination programme for 2020, coupled with the usual increased demand for services at this time could place an unsustainable burden on some General Practices.

At the recent Scottish Local Medical Committee Conference it was highlighted that lack of information about GP workload was hampering targeted support, and also potentially disadvantaging general practice in service planning when other services had extensive data about activity.

To that end, we are asking you to complete a short survey on a weekly basis. In pilots this survey has taken about 15-20 minutes to complete and asks about the number and nature of encounters with patients that took place in your practice in the previous week. The survey also asks about GP sessions and staff hours available, and hours lost, due to COVID-19 or otherwise to help us understand where there are imminent workforce capacity issues in the practice.

This is clearly an additional ask beyond what you are all already doing to provide vital medical care to your patients in this challenging time. If you can complete this on a weekly basis it will be a huge help to identify surges in activity, but we do understand the pressures you are under.

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HSCPs and NHS Boards will continue to work with yourselves at a practice level where necessary to explore local options to help with any developing issues around delivery of services where possible. Therefore, it is important that you continue to inform your local primary care team of any immediate staffing issues you may have.

Yours Sincerely,



Dr Carey Lunan
Chair
Royal College of GPs Scotland



Dr Andrew Cowie
Deputy Chair
BMA Scottish GP Committee

FAQ:**Where can I access the survey?**

A link to the online survey can be found here:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=veDvEDCgykuAnLXmdF5JmnudJIY2ZJdOoilCWnflWNtUNUdYS0NBmKZSQJMT5SDFaR000UDJOSy4u>. The survey can only be answered online (i.e. not by email, post etc.). Please direct any technical queries regarding the functionality of the online survey form to phs.generalpractice@phs.scot.

How often am I to fill it out?

Please fill in this survey each week from now on so we can analyse changes in practice-level workload. Your returns should relate to the previous Monday to Friday, and if at all possible be completed by each Tuesday evening. We intend to run this survey throughout the winter and spring and assess what we have learned at the end of April 2021. We will then pause to consider whether to continue with this over spring and summer 2021.

What happens if I miss a week?

If you miss a week don't worry – we know things are really busy. Please restart submitting as soon as you can, and ensure that you submit only one week at a time, making it clear in your answer to Question 4 to which week your submission refers (please don't aggregate and respond with two weeks' worth of data in one submission).

What will happen to this data?

The responses to your survey transfer securely to Public Health Scotland, who will undertake an initial analysis. We will provide you with high-level practice-specific analysis (e.g. charts showing how your responses are changing over time) regularly during this data collection exercise to help you with your own planning. You can access your own information and review your practice's trends over time using the PHS [Primary Care Information Dashboard](#).

A national summary, aggregated to the level of HSCPs/ NHS Board areas, will be provided to the Boards, HSCPs and Scottish Government to consider winter pressures across Scotland's health and social care system. This aggregated data will not be practice identifiable. NHS Boards, HSCPs, and Scottish Government will work together with SGPC, RCGP, and local clusters to identify any areas of concern for General Practices. These survey returns will be considered by the SG in conjunction with NHS Boards' existing weekly reporting on service levels and capacity.

What is the benefit to us of completing a form?

We realise that even modest additional tasks at this time are unwelcome and would not ask this of practices if it was not so important. Scottish Government, NSS, RCGP, and SGPC will continue to try to develop an automatic extract to demonstrate GP practice activity. Unfortunately, the GP data extracted last year using SPIRE was not fully suitable, and before SGPC can recommend any alternative to practices we need clarity about the data extracted and how it will be used – similarly to the Workforce and Earnings data last year. We will, of course, consult with SGPC before any such approach is approved.

Is it mandatory?

No – but we do strongly encourage you to fill this out if at all possible.

