



A manifesto for medicine

For a healthier nation with access to excellent care

The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) is calling on all political parties to put patients first and support doctors to deliver high-quality healthcare. This means:

- > creating more postgraduate training posts
- > giving all doctors protected time for teaching, supervision, research, quality improvement and leadership
- > prioritising NHS staff retention and wellbeing
- > more granular data collection and better workforce planning
- > looking to the future with a review of postgraduate medical training that looks at how doctors will want to learn and work in the future, and how patient demand is likely to change in the coming years.

Above all, it means prioritising the wellbeing of our doctors so they can prioritise excellent patient care.

Our five priorities for the next UK government

We are calling on all political parties to invest in:

- > **workforce** by ensuring that there are more physicians who have enough time to provide excellent patient care
- > **transformation** by empowering physicians to work with patients to redesign healthcare services
- > **prevention** by developing a cross-government strategy to reduce health inequalities and prevent ill health
- > **sustainability** by taking bold and ambitious action to tackle climate change and protect health
- > **innovation** by ensuring that physicians are able to take part in clinical research and quality improvement.



As we publish our manifesto ahead of the next UK general election, the RCP is looking to the future. Investing in these five priority areas – workforce, transformation, prevention, sustainability and innovation – will help the next government to deliver a healthier nation with access to excellent patient care.

With medicine becoming ever more complex, it is crucial that we make every effort to retain the next generation of physicians in the NHS: from doctors in national training programmes to those working as specialty or specialist doctors, from locally employed doctors to international medical graduates. Every single one of them deserves protected time for education and support for career development. The health of the nation depends on it.

After all, a healthy nation is an economic asset.

We will continue to campaign on the issues that make a difference to population health: preventing illness, reducing inequalities and tackling climate change. This election is a significant opportunity to improve the health of the population and reduce long-term pressure on the NHS. To do that, we need to put prevention at the heart of government policy and reduce the impact of ill health on our society and economy by resourcing the health service, so that people can access the right care and best treatments when they need them.

Dr Sarah Clarke

President
Royal College of Physicians



Too often, we hear from colleagues who are exhausted and demoralised because they are expected to juggle a heavy workload of acute patient care and specialty medicine, often while studying for professional exams and trying to maintain a life outside of work. Over time, the pressures on the NHS have

changed significantly, and medical training is suffering as a consequence. The current working environment leaves no place for flexibility and persistent rota gaps mean that the balance between training and service provision has now tipped too far towards the latter. Compassionate leadership from employers and senior doctors has been compromised.

The next generation of doctors deserves better. This is why the RCP was the first royal college to campaign for the doubling of medical school places. It's why the college is now calling for a wide-ranging review of postgraduate medical training that looks at how early career doctors will want to learn and work in the future. In this manifesto, we are delighted to see the RCP call for an expansion of postgraduate medical training places, extra support for those doctors not in



national training programmes, and a plan for specialty training based on population need.

The health of the nation and the health of our planet are intrinsically linked. The climate crisis is the biggest global threat to health, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable.

As doctors, we also see the impact of deprivation on our patients throughout their lives, many of whom are living with ill health because of their circumstances. This is not good enough: where we live and who we are should not determine whether we can access good quality healthcare in a reasonable timeframe.

The RCP's campaign for a cross-government strategy to reduce health inequalities, supported by more than 250 members of the [Inequalities in Health Alliance](#), calls on policymakers to tackle what makes us ill in the first place – to reduce pressure on the NHS, boost the economy and improve health and wellbeing.

Dr Melanie Nana and Dr Megan Rutter

Co-chairs, RCP Trainees Committee

Supporting a workforce that can meet the needs of patients now and in the future.

Workforce is the biggest challenge facing the NHS. With too few staff, it takes longer for patients to get the right care; for those working in the health service, the workload goes up and morale goes down.

Retention must be a priority for the next government. To keep people in the NHS and improve patient care, we need to create more flexible and supportive working environments and ensure that our medical students and early career doctors can access high-quality education and training.

The RCP is calling on the next government to work with the NHS to:

- > prioritise staff retention and workforce wellbeing by [getting the basics right](#)
- > fund and implement the [NHS England commitment](#) to double medical school places and expand the number of postgraduate training places for [physician specialties](#) based on population need, recognising that consultants and specialist doctors need protected time to supervise and teach early career doctors
- > develop and deliver a plan to support educators, supervisors, mentors and trainers by working with employers in the NHS to increase capacity for medical education and training
- > support ring-fenced time for education in job plans by working with employers to recognise teaching and continuous learning as an important part of direct clinical care
- > incentivise physicians of all career grades and specialties to take on education and leadership roles
- > commission a review of postgraduate medical training that looks at how doctors will want to learn and work in the future, and how patient demand is likely to change in the coming years
- > fund, deliver and engage with clinicians on the [Distribution of Medical Specialty Training Programme](#), which is reviewing and aligning specialty training placements to the areas of greatest need across England
- > value staff, associate specialist and specialist (SAS) and locally employed doctors by ensuring that all NHS organisations implement the [SAS charter](#) as well as the ‘SAS six’ policy proposals developed by the [SAS Collective](#)
- > support protected time for career development, education, research and quality improvement for all doctors, including locally employed doctors and those not in national training programmes.
- > take a zero-tolerance approach to workplace harassment, bullying and sexual misconduct in the NHS and develop systems to hold individuals and organisations to account
- > revise [independent staffing projections](#) every 2 years, prioritising improved granularity of specialty data to inform future projections of the number of specialty training places needed to meet population demand
- > develop and publish an evidence base and evaluation framework around the introduction of physician associates (PAs) while limiting the further expansion of the PA role until issues of regulation, standards and scope of practice are addressed
- > invest in well-functioning, interoperable IT systems, NHS equipment, facilities, estates and digital infrastructure with an ambitious multi-year capital funding settlement.

Empowering physicians to work with patients on healthcare transformation.

The way we deliver health and care for people does not meet the needs of our patients. With an ageing population, advances in medicine and more people living longer with multiple conditions, providing high-quality care is more complex than it used to be. Patients tell us that their care can be fragmented and the systems can be confusing. Too many people are being treated by multiple healthcare teams without effective communication or collaboration.

The RCP is calling on the next government to work with the NHS to:

- > create sufficient hospital and community-based capacity, so that acutely ill patients can receive care when they need it without harmful delays
- > reduce planned care waiting lists and transform outpatient care through expanding the workforce and investing in transformation of the wider system
- > proactively support patients to manage their own health at home while enabling them to contact health professionals when they need help
- > deliver a long-term comprehensive plan for social care that strengthens the health and care system and creates a workforce with attractive and competitive roles.

Focusing on what makes us ill in the first place by putting prevention first.

Good health plays a fundamental role in the prosperity of our nation. There is an almost 20-year gap in healthy life expectancy between the most and least deprived areas of England, with over 2.5 million more people projected to be living with a major illness by 2040.

Addressing the factors that cause ill health – including poor housing and food quality, low income, and air pollution – has to be a priority for the next government.

The RCP is calling on the next government to work with the NHS to:

- > deliver a cross-government strategy to reduce health inequalities, led by the prime minister, that considers the role of every government department and policy lever to tackle the wider determinants of health, with clear measurable goals and metrics and underpinned by the necessary funding settlement
- > commit to a prevention-first approach to improve population health with multi-year public health funding settlements
- > commit to bold action on obesity, including restricting junk food advertising and delivering funding to ensure equitable access to weight management services across the country
- > take increasingly ambitious action to improve both outdoor and indoor air quality as the science develops, with commitments made in legislation and the [Environmental Improvement Plan](#) a floor, not a ceiling
- > create a smokefree generation and tackle vaping among children and never-smokers by re-introducing the Tobacco and Vapes Bill to Parliament with urgency and deliver funding for NHS opt-out smoking cessation services.

Tackling climate change to protect population health and improve sustainability.

The climate crisis is the biggest global threat to health. Rising global temperatures will mean a greater prevalence of antimicrobial resistance, vector-borne infectious diseases and excess heat-related deaths. Global security will be threatened by flooding, conflict and famine, leading to climate migration that will create challenges for human health and the delivery of healthcare services.

Making changes that promote better public health and mitigate the impacts of climate change will bring significant benefits to the health of the planet and its people.

The RCP is calling on the next government to work with the NHS to:

- > appropriately fund and support the NHS to effectively prioritise environmental sustainability and reduce the environmental impact of healthcare delivery, with capital investment where necessary
- > prioritise a just transition from fossil fuels, alongside policy initiatives, to ensure that this process does not exacerbate health inequalities
- > ensure a robust and credible pathway for reaching the UK's emission reduction targets by 2050 at the very latest
- > put prevention at the heart of policy, recognising that reducing avoidable ill health and demand for healthcare will require cross-government action and bring environmental, health and economic benefits.

Ensuring that UK health policy is led by the latest research and innovation.

Clinical research is key to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of treatment. The successful development of the COVID-19 vaccine illustrated the fundamental importance of clinical research in healthcare and the UK's status as a world leader. Embedding research in everyday practice for all physicians will help to ensure that the NHS has the research capacity it needs and patients have access to the latest treatments and innovation.

The RCP is calling on the next government to work with the NHS to:

- > support protected time for research in job plans of those who want a substantive research leadership role
- > recognise and reward organisations that engage with research and industry to improve patient care
- > recognise clinical research as part of direct clinical care for doctors
- > incentivise doctors, medical students and other health professionals to participate in research.

Educating, improving, influencing

Through our work with patients and doctors, the RCP is working to achieve real change across the health and social care sector. As the membership body for physicians, we represent over 40,000 fellows and members in the UK and worldwide across 30 medical specialties, diagnosing and treating millions of patients every year. We campaign for improvements to healthcare, medical education and public health.

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**Royal College
of Physicians**