Policies and strategies to retain and support the return of experienced GPs in direct patient care: the ReGROUP mixed-methods study

John L Campbell,1* Emily Fletcher,1 Gary Abel,1 Rob Anderson,1 Rupatharshini Chilvers,2 Sarah G Dean,1 Suzanne H Richards,3 Anna Sansom,1 Rohini Terry,1 Alex Aylward,4 Grant Fitzner,5 Mayam Gomez-Cano,1 Linda Long,1 Navonil Mustafée,6 Sophie Robinson,1 Philip A Smart,6 Fiona C Warren,1 Jo Welsman7 and Chris Salisbury8

1Primary Care Research Group, University of Exeter Medical School, University of Exeter, Exeter, UK
2Tangerine Bee Ltd, Exeter, UK
3Academic Unit of Primary Care, Leeds Institute of Health Sciences, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK
4ReGROUP project Patient and Public Involvement Group, University of Exeter Medical School, University of Exeter, Exeter, UK
5NHS Improvement, London, UK
6University of Exeter Business School, University of Exeter, Exeter, UK
7Centre for Biomedical Modelling and Analysis, Living Systems Institute, University of Exeter, Exeter, UK
8Centre for Academic Primary Care, Bristol Medical School, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK

*Corresponding author john.campbell@exeter.ac.uk

Declared competing interests of authors: Rob Anderson is a current member of the National Institute for Health Research Health Services and Delivery Research Researcher-led Prioritisation Committee. However, in this role he would not be involved in any discussions or decisions about grant proposals in which he has any personal, institutional or financial connections to any of the applicants. Alex Aylward declares personal fees outside the submitted work from the Northern, Eastern and Western Devon Clinical Commissioning Group, the Devon Local Medical Committee, the British Medical Association, the Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (South West Peninsula) and the NHS England Medical Directorate (South).

Published April 2019
DOI: 10.3310/hsdr07140
Plain English summary

The ReGROUP mixed-methods study
Health Services and Delivery Research 2019; Vol. 7: No. 14
DOI: 10.3310/hsdr07140

NIHR Journals Library www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk
Plain English summary

The UK faces a serious shortage of general practitioners (GPs). The general population is ageing and has more and more complex health needs. GP shortages are likely to put patients at risk, and the NHS urgently needs to understand why GPs leave patient care. Plans to maintain the GP workforce are under way but lack strong research evidence. As GP training takes at least 10 years, recruiting more GPs is not sufficient; retaining existing GPs is essential.

The aim was to explore why GPs leave general practice and to develop policies and strategies to maintain the workforce. Six activities were carried out. First, existing research on GPs’ career decisions was reviewed: four factors have a major role (workload, job dissatisfaction, work-related stress and work–life balance). Second, 3370 GPs in south-west England were surveyed to estimate how many may leave within 5 years, finding a high likelihood of leaving and low GP morale. Third, 41 GPs of those who returned the survey, and people with a specific interest in the subject, were interviewed, seeking to understand GPs’ experiences. This highlighted three themes: professional identity and value of the GP role, fear and risk, and available career choices. These studies allowed the development of policies and strategies to retain the GP workforce. Fourth, a panel of experts reviewed the policies and strategies, judging those relating to supporting day-to-day running of practices and reducing work-related stress to be both appropriate and feasible. Fifth, computer models were developed to identify practices at risk of losing their GPs within 5 years and thus potentially in need of support. Finally, interested parties were asked to consider the feasibility of introducing the draft policies. Participants suggested a range of actions for policy-makers, which included the need to explore ‘portfolio’ roles for GPs, and the possibility of providing formal career training for key members of the primary care team, such as practice managers.
Health Services and Delivery Research

ISSN 2050-4349 (Print)
ISSN 2050-4357 (Online)

This journal is a member of and subscribes to the principles of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (www.publicationethics.org/).

Editorial contact: journals.library@nihr.ac.uk

The full HS&DR archive is freely available to view online at www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hsdr. Print-on-demand copies can be purchased from the report pages of the NIHR Journals Library website: www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk

Criteria for inclusion in the Health Services and Delivery Research journal

Reports are published in Health Services and Delivery Research (HS&DR) if (1) they have resulted from work for the HS&DR programme or programmes which preceded the HS&DR programme, and (2) they are of a sufficiently high scientific quality as assessed by the reviewers and editors.

HS&DR programme

The Health Services and Delivery Research (HS&DR) programme, part of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), was established to fund a broad range of research. It combines the strengths and contributions of two previous NIHR research programmes: the Health Services Research (HSR) programme and the Service Delivery and Organisation (SDO) programme, which were merged in January 2012.

The HS&DR programme aims to produce rigorous and relevant evidence on the quality, access and organisation of health services including costs and outcomes, as well as research on implementation. The programme will enhance the strategic focus on research that matters to the NHS and is keen to support ambitious evaluative research to improve health services.

For more information about the HS&DR programme please visit the website: http://www.nets.nihr.ac.uk/programmes/hsdr

This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its preceding programmes as project number 14/196/02. The contractual start date was in January 2016. The final report began editorial review in November 2017 and was accepted for publication in June 2018. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HS&DR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors’ report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

© Queen’s Printer and Controller of HMSO 2019. This work was produced by Campbell et al. under the terms of a commissioning contract issued by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. This issue may be freely reproduced for the purposes of private research and study and extracts (or indeed, the full report) may be included in professional journals provided that suitable acknowledgement is made and the reproduction is not associated with any form of advertising. Applications for commercial reproduction should be addressed to: NIHR Journals Library, National Institute for Health Research, Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre, Alpha House, University of Southampton Science Park, Southampton SO16 7NS, UK.

Published by the NIHR Journals Library (www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk), produced by Prepress Projects Ltd, Perth, Scotland (www.prepress-projects.co.uk).
NIHR Journals Library Editor-in-Chief

Professor Ken Stein  Chair of HTA and EME Editorial Board and Professor of Public Health, University of Exeter Medical School, UK

NIHR Journals Library Editors

Professor Ken Stein  Chair of HTA and EME Editorial Board and Professor of Public Health, University of Exeter Medical School, UK

Professor Andrée Le May  Chair of NIHR Journals Library Editorial Group (HS&DR, PGfAR, PHR journals)

Professor Matthias Beck  Professor of Management, Cork University Business School, Department of Management and Marketing, University College Cork, Ireland

Dr Tessa Crilly  Director, Crystal Blue Consulting Ltd, UK

Dr Eugenia Cronin  Senior Scientific Advisor, Wessex Institute, UK

Dr Peter Davidson  Consultant Advisor, Wessex Institute, University of Southampton, UK

Ms Tara Lamont  Scientific Advisor, NETSCC, UK

Dr Catriona McDaid  Senior Research Fellow, York Trials Unit, Department of Health Sciences, University of York, UK

Professor William McGuire  Professor of Child Health, Hull York Medical School, University of York, UK

Professor Geoffrey Meads  Professor of Wellbeing Research, University of Winchester, UK

Professor John Norrie  Chair in Medical Statistics, University of Edinburgh, UK

Professor John Powell  Consultant Clinical Adviser, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), UK

Professor James Raftery  Professor of Health Technology Assessment, Wessex Institute, Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton, UK

Dr Rob Riemsma  Reviews Manager, Kleijnen Systematic Reviews Ltd, UK

Professor Helen Roberts  Professor of Child Health Research, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, UK

Professor Jonathan Ross  Professor of Sexual Health and HIV, University Hospital Birmingham, UK

Professor Helen Snooks  Professor of Health Services Research, Institute of Life Science, College of Medicine, Swansea University, UK

Professor Jim Thornton  Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Nottingham, UK

Professor Martin Underwood  Warwick Clinical Trials Unit, Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick, UK

Please visit the website for a list of editors: www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/about/editors

Editorial contact: journals.library@nihr.ac.uk