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Royal College
of Nursing

General Practice Nursing Today 2026 What the findings mean for the future of primary care nursing

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Development of the Survey

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Why This Report Matters

- General Practice Nursing is an essential pillar of primary care.
- Demand and complexity continue to increase.
- Workforce sustainability is becoming a significant concern.
- The report provides a snapshot of the current reality for GPNs in the UK.

About the Survey

Survey population

- 1,045 responses
- Distributed to approximately 7,000 primary care nursing staff
- Around 15% response rate
- Included nurses and nursing associates working in general practice settings

Who are today's GPN Workforce?

Workforce profile

- 55% of registered nurses have been on the NMC register for more than 20 years
- Around 50% have worked in general practice for over 10 years
- 97% female
- 84% White British

The Potential Cliff Edge

The report raises concern about future workforce supply as large numbers of experienced GPNs approach retirement.

Questions for systems

- Who replaces this expertise?
- Are we attracting enough early career nurses?
- Is primary care visible enough in pre-registration training?

What GPNs Deliver

Over 102,000 appointments per week

Most common activities:

- Long-term condition reviews
- Results reviews
- Clinical procedures
- Immunisations and vaccinations
- Urgent and unplanned care

GPNs are managing complexity, not simply delivering tasks.

Unpaid Workload

Findings

- 29% undertake paid overtime
- 77% undertake unpaid overtime
- Average unpaid overtime = 3.14 hours per week

Estimated impact

Equivalent to approximately:

- 2.5 million hours unpaid work annually
- Around £51 million of unpaid labour per year if representative nationally

Are We Working Safely?

Findings

- 36% add patients to already full clinics every day
- Only 32% believe appointment times are adequate for safe practice

Growing complexity requires:

- Appropriate consultation lengths
- Safe workload management
- Adequate staffing

Complexity in Practice

The report identifies:

- Multimorbidity
- Poor disease control
- Behavioural risk factors
- Language barriers
- Medical anxiety as key drivers of complexity.

Appointment volumes alone do not tell the whole story.
Complexity drives workload.

Failure Demand

Nurses describe spending time addressing:

- IT problems
- Poor interoperability
- Incorrect appointment booking
- Administrative tasks
- Secondary care communication issues
- Equipment and estate issues

Respondents estimated:

- 1,897.9 hours per week spent on work that should not fall to them
- Equivalent nationally to around 42,500 hours weekly if representative

Pay, Conditions and Professional Recognition

Themes

- Pay variability
- Below equivalent NHS Agenda for Change rates
- Inconsistent sick pay
- Variable maternity provision
- Limited annual leave in some settings

Impact

- Morale
- Recruitment
- Retention

What are nurses telling us?

- "Lack of time"
- "Constant pressure"
- "Increasing complexity"
- "Not feeling valued"
- "Unable to spend enough time with patients"

Health, Wellbeing and Retention Risk

Findings

Many respondents reported intentions to:

- Reduce hours
- Leave practice nursing
- Retire early

The report also identifies evidence of stress, burnout and moral injury.

What Keeps GPNs Going?

Despite the challenges, respondents described:

- Strong commitment to patients
- Professional pride
- Job satisfaction when supported
- Value of long-term patient relationships

The workforce remains committed, but commitment alone is not a workforce strategy.

So What Needs to Change?

1. Investment in the workforce
2. Better workforce planning
3. Improved employment conditions
4. Protected CPD
5. Stronger clinical leadership
6. Improved infrastructure and digital systems
7. Consistent career pathways

Reflection for Practices

- How are we reducing failure demand?
- Are consultation times safe and realistic?
- How are we retaining experienced GPNs?
- What are we doing to attract the next generation?
- Are GPNs recognised as leaders in neighbourhood care?

Reflections

General Practice Nursing is not a workforce in crisis. It is a workforce carrying increasing responsibility despite significant system pressures.

The challenge is no longer proving the value of GPNs. The challenge is creating the conditions that allow them to continue delivering high-quality care.

Turning Evidence into Action

- Following publication of the survey, listening groups were held with General Practice Nurses across England to explore the findings in greater depth.
- Thematic analysis of the discussions has now been completed.
- The report is anticipated to be published by the end of 2026 or in early 2027.
- Findings will further inform understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the General Practice Nursing workforce.

Informing Future Guidance

This collective evidence will be used to develop recommendations on safe and effective General Practice Nursing consultation and appointment times, including:

- Recommended minimum appointment lengths for key areas of practice
- Consideration of patient complexity and clinical risk
- Support for high-quality, person-centred care
- Guidance to support workforce sustainability and professional wellbeing
- Recommendations for systems, PCNs and practices

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