BMA quarterly survey

Current views from across the medical profession
Quarter 2: 2019

Public health and healthcare
Background

- The BMA’s Public Health and Healthcare function (PHH) manages an **online panel** of just over 2,000 member doctors.

- The panel is broadly representative of the main areas of medical practice and is used for quarterly surveys on topical health questions. The survey also includes recurrent questions to track wellbeing and morale. These are repeated every quarter.

- Topical issues included this round were questions on social prescribing, ambulance call-outs, NHS 111, NHS pressures, including bed availability and patient safety.

- The survey allows for questions on a range of policy issues – if you are a health organisation interested in working with us, contact **info.phhd@bma.org.uk**.
Methodology

– For this quarter, the survey was sent to 2,130 panel members.

– Panel members were emailed a link to the online survey which was open between 28 May and 18 June 2019.

– The total number of completed replies was 729 (a response rate of 34%).

– The following analysis includes comparisons across the largest branches of practice.
Findings

– More than nine in 10 respondents think the NHS to be in a state of year round crisis.

– More than four in 10 hospital doctors say that there are fewer beds available in the service in which they work, compared to one year ago.

– However, slightly more respondents thought their service was prepared versus unprepared, to cope through summer to autumn 2019.

– Respondents were most likely to say patient safety has been compromised by competing pressures of insufficient funding, rising patient demand and a lack of doctors.
Findings

- **Half of all respondents** were positive about the impact of Primary Care Networks (PCNs) upon integration of primary care and the wider system, but were more muted on other potential benefits.

- This should be seen in the context of **almost six in 10 respondents** describing their understanding of the role of PCNs as limited with **three in 10** saying they had no understanding at all.

- **Over half of GPs** said that an ambulance had been delayed in reaching their practice very regularly or often, when called out during an emergency.

- There remains little confidence in NHS 111 among doctors, with **over two-thirds** saying it is ineffective at directing patients to the right services.
Respondents: branch of medical practice

‘Other’ doctors include respondents that were working in medical academia, public health, doctors outside one of the main fields of practice and a small number of unemployed doctors or those on a career break.

When retirees were questioned further about their last working post, consultant and GP contractor/principal were most frequently reported.

Question: What grade is your current post?
30% of respondents were working less than full time.

Question: Are you working: full time, less than full time, unemployed, on a career break, on maternity leave, retired?
Social prescribing

The following questions were asked of GPs
59% of respondents reported having access to a social prescribing scheme compared to 41% who did not.

Question: Did you have access to a social prescribing scheme?
Frequency of using social prescribing

Question: How often have you used social prescribing in your practice in the last year? Percentages do not total 100% due to decimal rounding.
PCNs (Primary Care Networks)

The following questions were asked of GPs only
Almost half respondents (48%) thought PCNs would be positive for integration between primary care and the wider health and care system.

Question: What impact do you think PCNs can make on each of the following?

Integration between primary care and the wider health and care system:
- Highly negative: 11%
- Moderately negative: 5%
- Neither positive or negative: 4%
- Moderately positive: 39%
- Highly positive: 46%

Increasing the voice of general practice in the NHS:
- Highly negative: 22%
- Moderately negative: 13%
- Neither positive or negative: 53%
- Moderately positive: 28%
- Highly positive: 0%

Practice workload:
- Highly negative: 8%
- Moderately negative: 22%
- Neither positive or negative: 49%
- Moderately positive: 16%
- Highly positive: 64%

Practice funding:
- Highly negative: 15%
- Moderately negative: 16%
- Neither positive or negative: 64%
- Moderately positive: 4%
- Highly positive: 0%

GP retention:
- Highly negative: 21%
- Moderately negative: 28%
- Neither positive or negative: 21%
- Moderately positive: 11%
- Highly positive: 46%

Percentages may not total 100% due to decimal rounding.
Question: Which of the following would you say are the biggest challenges facing PCNs in their first year? Ranking: 9 is most important, 1 is least important.
Understanding the Role of PCNs

Only 13% of GP respondents had a good understanding of the role of PCNs.

Question: How much understanding of the role of Primary Care Networks do you have?
Ambulance call-outs

The following question as asked of GPs
Delays in ambulance call-outs to general practice

Over half of respondents (56%) have regularly experienced delays in ambulance call-outs to their practice in the last year with only 17% reporting that they rarely or never experienced delays.

Question: How often have you experienced delays in ambulance call-outs to your practice in the last year?
NHS 111

The following question as asked of GPs
How effective do you think NHS 111 is in directing patients to the right services?

Over two-thirds (68%) of respondents thought NHS 111 was ineffective in directing patients to the right services.
NHS pressures

The following questions were asked of secondary care doctors
Availability of beds in secondary care since winter 2018-19

49% reported reduced bed availability compared to the same time last year

Question: How would you characterise the availability of beds at the service you work in since the end of winter (April onwards) compared with this time last year?
To what extent would you agree with the statement ‘The NHS is now in a state of year-round crisis’?

Over 90% of respondents agreed with the statement that the NHS is now in a state of year-round crisis, compared to just 4% who disagreed with the statement.

Overall percentage is less than 100% due to decimal rounding.
How would you rate the preparedness of the service where you work for the coming summer (from now until the beginning of October)?

Just over 37% thought the service was prepared for the 2019 summer compared to 29% who thought it was not prepared.
Challenges to patient safety since 1 April 2019

Question: Has patient safety been compromised because of any of the following since April 1st?

- Insufficient number of other clinical staff: 73%
- Very high demand levels: 72%
- Insufficient number of doctors: 69%
- Excessively high level of bed occupancy: 59%
- Lack of beds: 58%
- Existing backlogs and patient waiting lists: 43%
- Other: 12%
Current morale
This quarter, 41% of respondents described their morale as being low or very low, compared to only 22% of respondents who described morale as being high or very high.

There is a significant difference between the morale of those who are retired and the average of those who are working. To gain a more accurate picture of the morale of those currently working, retirees were excluded from this analysis.

**Question:** Taking everything into account, how would you describe your current level of morale?
Average morale by branch of practice

All branches of practice continue to have low morale, with GPs’ morale lowest of all groups.

Morale is recorded using a 5-point scale (1 = very low, 3 = moderate, 5 = very high).

Question: Taking everything into account, how would you describe your current level of morale?
Morale over time remains consistently low for most branches of practice.

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**Time series for average morale by branch of practice**

- **Junior doctor in training**
- **GP**
- **Consultant**
- **SAS**

Moderate morale
Workload
Consistent with previous editions of the quarterly survey, this quarter shows that GPs remain the most likely to report working outside their regular hours ‘very often’.

Question: In the last month, how often have you worked or trained outside your regular hours?