

Welcome to the Patients Association Weekly News



GP surgery closure 'hit all-time high' in 2018



More than half a million UK patients had to change their GP practice last year as a result of their surgery closing or merging with another practice, [new data](#) showed today.

The medical website Pulse found that 138 doctors' premises shut their doors in 2018, compared with 18 in 2013. They closed at the rate of more than two per week, affecting an estimated 519,500 patients in total. The news comes as official figures from NHS Digital [reveal](#) the number of GPs in England has fallen to 28,697 full-time equivalent qualified GPs, a drop of 441 from March 2018.

Rachel Power, Chief Executive of the Patients Association, said:

"Patients will be right to feel alarmed by these findings. Many may be left wondering if their practice might be next to face closure, particularly if it is a small practice with just one or two doctors. It's particularly concerning to see smaller practices being forced to shut up shop. Many of their patients will have built strong and important relationships with their family doctor over many years in order to help them manage their condition. These closures could leave patients facing long waits, and push more towards A&E – which we know is under severe pressure itself."

"While we would expect to see change, and even transformation, in general practice as the NHS Long Term Plan is implemented, that isn't what's happening here. In the future, primary care should be providing a wider range of services, better integrated with community NHS teams and geared up to keeping people in good health outside hospital. But these closures and mergers appear to stem directly from the well-known, long-term failures in workforce planning and shortage of funding for the NHS in the face of rising patient need, and put the delivery of the plan at risk.

You can read more about the story [here](#).

[Read more](#)

Working in partnership: improving complaints handling



While our policy and helpline work are central to us as an independent charity, we also pride ourselves on working in collaboration with other charities, companies, NHS trusts and patient groups. All of our projects involve listening to patients to make improvements that they have identified as important.

We are currently working on projects across the country on a range of topics, from improving complaints handling and developing patient participation groups to using digital technology. We work with NHS trusts on improving complaints handling, and recently we were at North Middlesex hospital to discuss putting patients at the heart of complaints resolution. We spoke about fair investigations and stressed the importance of clear and open communication.

If you would like to know more about our project work you can visit our website or email mailbox@patients-association.com

[Read more](#)

Patient's Choice Awards - voting now open



[Voting is now open](#) to choose the winner of one of nursing's most prestigious accolades: the Patient's Choice category of the RCNi Nurse Awards. The award, which is supported by the Patients Association, enables members of the public to thank a nurse, midwife, health visitor, healthcare assistant or assistant practitioner who has provided exceptional care. Voting is open to everyone.

Five inspirational nurses have been chosen as finalists this year from scores of nominations by patients. Those who nominated the finalists include a young woman diagnosed with cancer while at university and a teenager whose mental health worker has supported her towards recovery.

Rachel Power, Chief Executive of the Patients Association, said:

"It was incredibly heart-warming to read patients' accounts describing how nurses have gone above and beyond the call of duty, and it was challenging to shortlist just five nurses for these prestigious awards. The commitment, care and dedication of these nurses to their patients is without question – it's now up to the public to make the difficult choice and decide who should be the winner."

Voting closes at midnight on 14 June, and the winner will be announced at the RCNi Nurse Awards ceremony in London on 3 July.

[Vote now](#)

Survey: Tell us about your experiences of unsafe, premature discharge



Have you completed our latest [survey](#) on unsafe discharge from hospital?

We want to hear about times when someone has been discharged from hospital despite not being well enough to leave. If the person suffered harm as a result of this, or was at a real risk of harm, it was an unsafe discharge.

Too little research has been done on discharges that simply happened too early, even though we hear about this from callers to our helpline. If you think your experience, or the experience of someone close to you, matches this description of an unsafe, premature discharge, please [share your experiences with us](#) in this short survey.

We will be issuing a report, based on what people tell us. The survey should take around seven minutes to complete. Share your views [here](#).

[Complete the survey](#)

From the helpline: obtaining a medical certificate



This week we were contacted by Mark*, who got in touch following an appointment he had arranged at his GP surgery. Mark had recently been offered a new job and needed to provide a medical certificate before taking up the new position. He went to his local GP surgery and paid the £100 fee he was quoted for the consultation and certificate, but was unable to attend the appointment he had booked. Despite cancelling in advance, Mark's GP practice refused to refund him the £100 and they also refused to arrange another appointment for him to see the doctor.

Mark wanted to find out more about his rights and how he should obtain the medical certificate he required for his new job.

Our helpline adviser informed Mark that GPs charge a fee for writing letters and compiling medical reports (eg for insurance providers, driving (DVLA), housing and benefit appeals, and employers), and that these services fall outside of the NHS GP contract. When medical reports are provided they are a private service and as such, have to be completed in the GP's own time outside of their paid NHS working hours. These services incur a fee, which is set at the GP surgery's discretion, although informed by the British Medical Association's guidance. Our adviser suggested that Mark contacts NHS England to inform them of the situation and seek advice. We recommended that Mark get in touch with his local Citizens Advice Bureaux or an independent advice centre for information about how to recover his payment. We also suggested to Mark that he may wish to consider seeing a GP in the private sector to obtain the certificate he needs for his new job, and supplied him with the information to search for a doctor in the private sector.

We asked Mark to keep us updated on his progress, and to contact us if we could provide any additional information. If you need advice about any aspect of health and social care, you can contact our helpline on 020 8423 8999, or email helpline@patients-association.com. You can find out more about our helpline and advice

service [here](#).

*Name changed

[Contact our helpline](#)



What our team is reading this week

[Going digital: three crucial areas for NHS policy](#)

[Dying patients denied good care because of staff shortages, nurses say](#)

[Psychiatrists call for warnings over antidepressant withdrawal](#)

[Go running over cycling to avoid brittle bones, men told](#)

[Three-quarters of food bought in UK hospitals is unhealthy, audit shows](#)

About us

Our vision is that health and social care will be delivered in a way that meets every person's health and social care needs.

Our mission is to give effect to the patient voice, to improve patient experience and support people to engage fully in their own care. Find out more about our values on our [website](#).



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