

Health experts find Physician Associates provide efficient care for patients and can take the pressure off GPs

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A study into the impact on the NHS of a new type of health worker who help doctors has shown they can help relieve pressure on general practitioners (GPs).

The Physician Associates (PAs) work to a supervising doctor and see mainly patients requesting same day or urgent appointments in general practice.

In the first UK study into their impact, led by [health experts](#) at St George's, University of London, and Kingston University, have shown PAs are acceptable to patients, effective, efficient and safe.

The study team found the PAs complemented the work of GPs, seeing patients who have more minor problems but to maximise their impact in general practice they now need to be authorised to prescribe medicines.

Vari Drennan, Professor of Health Care and Policy Research, at the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education, which is jointly managed by the two universities, said: "We found that the relatively new role of Physician Associate can make a valuable and flexible contribution to primary care in the NHS supporting GPs and helping respond to growing patient use of [primary care services](#).

"However, in order to maximise their contribution, consideration needs to be given to the appropriate level of regulation and the potential for allowing them to prescribe medicines.

"Future research is required to investigate their potential contribution across a host of areas including urgent care facilities and in hospital medical teams."

The study was funded by the National Institute for Health Research Health Services & Delivery Research Programme.

The study has been published in *Health Services & Delivery Research*.

More information: Drennan VM, Halter M, Brearley S, Carneiro W, Gabe J, Gage H, et al. "Investigating the contribution of physician assistants to primary care in England: a mixed-methods study." *Health Serv Deliv Res* 2014;2(16). [www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk ...
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