

Paper highlights positive stories of GP work

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The often under-reported positive aspects of a GP's working life have been uncovered by a University of Manchester researcher in a series of in-depth interviews with experienced doctors.

Their publication in the *British Journal of General Practice* is intended to reveal less-prominent perspectives through stories told by clinicians whose careers have spanned a period of profound organisational change and shifting societal expectations.

Dr Sharon Spooner hopes that recognition of what is professionally satisfying in general practice will contribute to a more balanced consideration of GP careers and highlight the importance of sustained workforce engagement when restructuring [health care services](#).

GP job satisfaction is reported to be at an all-time low and there have been recent campaigns to address a shortfall in recruitment to general practice. Dr Spooner, who in addition to her University of Manchester research role is herself a GP, wanted to offer a counter-narrative by shedding light on aspects of [work](#) which added to job satisfaction for experienced GP colleagues.

She said: "The purpose of finding positive aspects of a GP's job isn't just to counter negative media and policy narratives but to help inform strategies which make this an appealing career choice and to inform policies which will emphasise appropriate reforms and training."

Dr Spooner interviewed eight GPs who had graduated in the 1980s to ensure that, with around 25 years in the NHS, they were experienced in the job and with making adjustments to evolving health policies.

They each spoke about their work for up to two hours, covering topics such as interacting with patients, working within the NHS and the ways in which their primary care teams were organised.

GPs generally felt proud of working in their jobs, recognised the privileged interaction they had with patients over long periods, appreciated opportunities to teach, to work flexibly and to develop their own services.

One GP, anonymised as 'George' said: "I saw a patient today who ... was already struggling as a teenager when I first met her 22 years ago ... psychiatry has bounced around saying she is just 'personality disorder'

and so ... impossible to treat, and I have seen her through my whole career ... she comes back time and time and time and time again. It's got to be a privilege hasn't it because you know that's something that no one else will have with that person, and she obviously respects me."

Dr Spooner added: "To attract and retain motivated GPs we should understand more about what it is that provides that positive motivation. We should select and train GPs to be adaptable in the face of change and to work in closely-knit teams to provide additional support.

"The evidence provided by these GPs shows that although it might be unfashionable to say so, [general practice](#) can still be a great place to work."

More information: S. Spooner. Unfashionable tales: narratives about what is (still) great in NHS general practice, *British Journal of General Practice* (2016). [DOI: 10.3399/bjgp16X683401](https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp16X683401)

Provided by University of Manchester

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