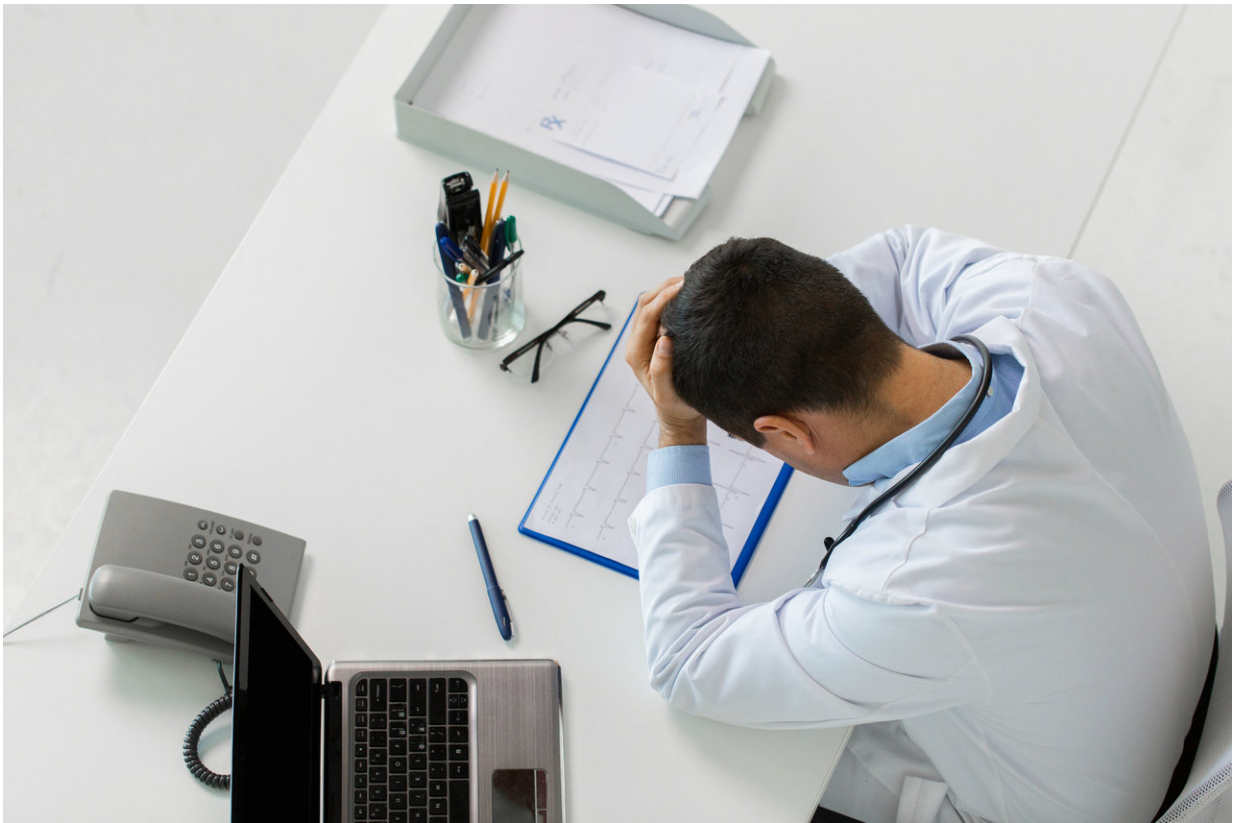


Why so many doctors in the UK are at risk of burnout

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More than a thousand GPs have sought professional help from the UK's NHS GP Health Service in the past year, with most cases involving stress, anxiety and depression and about 2% addiction. Credit: Lancaster University

More than a thousand GPs have sought professional help from the NHS

GP Health Service since it was set up in 2017, with most cases involving stress, anxiety and depression and about 2% addiction.

One in four have already left the profession which faces a recruitment crisis with only one in five new medical graduates choose to become GPs.

One of those who got help from the NHS GP Health Service is Dr Zoe Norris who almost quit at the age of 34 after becoming a workaholic to cope with the workload.

"I was drinking too much to try and relax. I lived off takeaways, too tired to cook. I was tired all the time, aching all over. I stopped caring and turned into the kind of GP I had always scored- impersonal, impatient, unfeeling."

Dr Euan Lawson is one of the authors of "Wellbeing: Combatting Burnout in General Practice". He is Director of Community Studies at Lancaster Medical School and a practising GP himself.

He said: "Worryingly, half of GP leavers are younger than 50 years old and 77% of those planning on switching careers are younger than 55 years old. It seems that GPs are burning out quickly and burning out young.

"Nearly half of the current workforce is committed to leaving [general practice](#) or considering doing so in the near future."

A quarter of GPs feel that work stress has made them unwell in the past year and almost a third do not see themselves continuing to work in GP practice for another five years.

Burnout symptoms include feelings of detachment and lack of empathy

towards patients while some GPs become workaholics, suffering from anxiety and depression.

"Unaddressed, and with added vulnerabilities, burnout for all doctors can lead to substance misuse, depression, anxiety and suicide."

Factors leading to burnout include:

- Increasing workload, with more appointments as the population ages. The average person now sees their GP over five times a year
- shorter appointments, making it difficult to deliver [high quality care](#)
- negative media portrayals of GPs as overpaid and demanding
- increasing dependence of patients on doctors in the absence of traditional support networks - with one patient asking her GP to change TV remote control batteries
- rising patient expectations, leading to more complaints

"The effect of these many different stressors on GPs has been likened to the effect of rising water temperatures on a boiling frog."

Solutions include changes to working practices, from using technology to deliver care remotely and involving other health professionals in primary care, including social workers, mental health nurses, physiotherapists and pharmacists.

Other suggestions include flexible working hours, mentoring programmes for social support and psychological therapies to reduce stress and anxiety.

Dr Lawson said: "Until we accept that stress and burnout are an almost universal experience within medicine, felt by almost all doctors at one

time or another, then it is unlikely that we will succeed in creating systems and working environments in which the threat of [burnout](#) can be mitigated."

Wellbeing: Combatting Burnout in General Practice. Adam Staten and Euan Lawson. Out now and published by CRC Press (T&F).

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/GP-Wellbeing-Combatting-Burnout-Practice/dp/1138066273/>

Provided by Lancaster University

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