

More doctors in England and Wales choosing to retire early

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Increasing numbers of doctors are opting to take voluntary early retirement, rather than waiting to claim their pension at retirement age, official figures show.

Figures provided to *The BMJ* by the NHS Business Services Authority under a freedom of information request show that the number of GPs

and hospital doctors in England and Wales opting for voluntary [early retirement](#) has increased by an average of 9.3% year on year, rising from 376 in 2008 to 1,424 in 2023.

Over the same period, the number retiring on the basis of age has fallen, from 2030 in 2008 to 1,721 in 2023.

The rise in early retirement was seen for hospital doctors and GPs. The number of hospital doctors retiring early rose from 178 in 2008 to 557 in 2023, while the number of GPs doing so rose from 198 in 2008 to 867 in 2023.

Overall, the total number of doctors retiring has risen by 35% over the past 15 years, from 2,431 in 2008 to 3,277 in 2023.

Over the same time frame, the total number of doctors employed by the NHS in England and Wales has increased by 27%, from 141,000 in 2008 to 179,000 in 2023.

The figures relate to doctors who claimed their NHS pension in a specific pension year, some of whom may have returned to work in the NHS in other roles after claiming their pensions.

Vishal Sharma, chair of the BMA Consultants Committee and pensions committee, said that the data on retirement backed up what the BMA had been saying for many years about the premature loss of vital clinical expertise from the NHS.

He told *The BMJ*, "Whether through reduced hours or retirement, the loss of expertise of our most senior doctors—whether in hospitals or GP practices—is a huge loss for patients, colleagues, and the future of the NHS."

The data trend coincided with the introduction of pension taxation rules that penalized doctors for doing more hours or staying in work, he pointed out.

Sarah Tennant, chair of the [pension](#) committee of the [hospital](#) doctors' union HCSA, added, "Substantial erosion of doctors' pay over the past decade further incentivizes them to lock in their benefits because, unlike pay, pensions in payment are inflation linked. Pensions tax has been a significant and increasing cause of early retirement among senior doctors, and we fear it will remain so, due to continued uncertainty."

More information: More doctors are choosing to retire early, *The BMJ* (2023). DOI: [10.1136/bmj.p1450](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.p1450).
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