

Number of NHS doctors taking early retirement has tripled since 2008

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The number of doctors taking early retirement from the NHS has more than tripled over the past 13 years, 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 who took voluntary early retirement or retired because of ill health rose from 401 in 2007-08 to 1358 in 2020-21.

Overall, the total number of doctors retiring rose by 21% over this period, from 2431 in 2007-08 to 2952 in 2020-21.

The figures also show that, as the number of doctors retiring early has risen, the number retiring on the basis of age has fallen—from 2030 in 2007-08 to 1594 in 2020-21. The average age at which doctors are retiring has also fallen over this period, from 61 years old in 2007-08 to 59 years old in 2020-21.

The British Medical Association (BMA) says that changes to tax regulation is one of main reasons prompting doctors to retire.

Vishal Sharma, chair of the BMA pensions committee, said that the current pension taxation system was "punitive" and left "senior doctors with little option but to consider [early retirement](#)."

Sharma said the situation had been made worse by the government's decision to freeze the lifetime allowance for pensions taxation for next five years, which will increase the amount of tax that many doctors have to pay on their pensions.

"A BMA survey demonstrated that 72% of doctors would consider retiring even earlier as a result of these changes," he added. "The combination of an exhausted workforce coupled with the freezing of the lifetime allowance being imposed at the same time will potentially result in a mass exodus of highly experienced doctors, at a time when patients need them the most."

He said that a "simple but effective" change that the government could make would be to implement a tax unregistered [pension](#) scheme in the NHS.

"The Government has already implemented such a scheme for the judiciary to address similar recruitment and retention issues," he explained. "A comparable solution within the NHS will allow our most experienced doctors to remain working in the NHS and consequently avert this workforce crisis."

More information: Doctors' early retirement has trebled since 2008, [DOI: 10.1136/bmj.n1594](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n1594)

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