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# Suffolk is hit by a shortage of doctors

## Concern that county is regarded as a 'desert' by potential GPs

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A shortage of GPs in Suffolk needs to be tackled to avoid a "staffing crisis" as the county struggles to attract doctors to the area.

Suffolk has been described as a "desert", with potential doctors preferring to practice in London and Cambridge.

With the training scheme in east Suffolk under subscribed and some practices unable to fill places, doctors are calling for more to be done to turn it around.

Annie Topping, chief executive of Healthwatch Suffolk, said: "We know that our local services are already showing signs of strain.

"This is due to many reasons but we are very aware of the potential for a staffing crisis in primary care."

The health watchdog has received around 2,500 comments complaining about waiting times and booking problems.

GPs have claimed Suffolk's "disproportionately" elderly population leads to longer hours at a time when surgeries are already stretched, pushing experienced doctors out of the profession.

Paul Driscoll, a GP trainer and partner at the Haven Health

surgery in Felixstowe, said: "We have 15 places on the Ipswich training scheme and I think we filled 11.

"We are not where we would like to be. I have two training places in my surgery and we currently only have one filled.

"We have two medical schools in the region. In Norwich at the UEA, 50% [of their students] go into general practice whereas at Cambridge University it is somewhere between five and 10%.

"It [Cambridge] is not good enough really, more needs to be done."

Dr Driscoll, a board member of the GP Federation in Suffolk, says London and Cambridge are drawing potential GPs away from the county.

Dr John Havard, of Saxmundham Health doctor's surgery, said he has been unable to fill a vacancy for some time.

He said: "We need half the doctors we train to become GPs and it is not happening.

"Even those who train in Suffolk, they do not want to stay, some go to work in London some are going abroad and it is just really sad."

Dr Havard said bad publicity around GPs and more complicated

and longer working days could be discouraging people from entering the profession.

He revealed that the GP Federation in Suffolk is considering a scheme where GPs with young families are given weekends in the county, touring the practices and the strong local schools.

The shortage was debated by healthcare professionals on Wednesday at the West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group monthly meeting, where David Cripps, a practice manager, said many GPs saw Suffolk as a "desert".

Andrew Eley, the group's deputy chief operating officer, said: "It is recognised that nationally, and locally in Suffolk, there is an on-going issue of GP recruitment." He said the CCG is working with NHS England and Suffolk County Council in a bid to address the problem.

NHS England admitted that the county has a problem with GP retention and recruitment, but stressed it is already working to reverse the trend.

