

# £2.4bn boost for GPs 'a step in the

NHS England chief: We could not ignore pressures on surgeries



■ Simon Stevens, NHS England chief executive

NHS England's chief executive Simon Stevens said: "GPs are by far the largest branch of British medicine, and as a recent *British Medical Journal* headline put it - if general practice fails, the whole NHS fails. So if anyone ten years ago had said: 'Here's what the NHS should now do - cut the share of funding for primary care and grow the number of hospital specialists three times faster than GPs', they'd have been laughed out of court."

"But looking back over a decade, that's exactly what's happened. Which is why it's no great surprise that a recent international survey revealed British GPs are under far greater pressure than their counterparts, with rising workload matched by growing patient concerns about convenient access. So rather than ignore these real pressures, the NHS has at last begun openly acknowledging them. Now we need to act, and this plan sets out exactly how."

Suffolk doctors say the county is well placed to capitalise on the multi-billion pound funding package announced this week to "get general practice back on its feet" - but warned more work needed to be done.

NHS England's chief executive Simon Stevens pledged on Thursday an extra £2.4 billion a year for GP services by 2020/21 - a 14% increase on the current budget - following talks with doctor leaders.

The announcement came amid growing concerns about the pressures facing general practices across the country and just days after it emerged two Ipswich surgeries had applied to close their patient lists due to sustainability issues.

Three of the four GP practices in Clacton had already taken similar steps, with one GP in the town warning there was a "very real possibility" of patients being unable to access services locally.

Last night, Billy McKee, a GP based at Walton Surgery in Felixstowe, said the announcement was a "step in the right direction - but there's still a lot of work to do".

"The important thing is that it stems the decline in funding," he added.

"It shows commitment from the NHS to manage the risk brought by a lack of investment, they recognise that up until now this has been an air crash waiting to happen."

NHS England said the investment will be boosted by a £500 million national "turnaround" package for GPs and announced steps to strengthen the workforce and "redesign the way modern primary care is offered to patients". It hopes to double the growth rate in GPs, bringing a further 5,000 to the workforce

Andrew Hirst

andrew.hirst@archant.co.uk

MP Dan Poulter, who is a qualified doctor, said: "General practice is the first point of contact with our health service for many people, but as more and more is asked of our GPs then we must ensure they are properly funded and supported."

"So this is a much needed and welcome investment by Simon Stevens and the team and NHS England that will help GPs to deliver more care and patient services for the patients in Suffolk."

A spokesman for the West Suffolk and Ipswich and East Suffolk CCGs highlighted the "hard work" carried out across Suffolk's GP practices.

"Primary care is the bedrock of the NHS and we welcome the acknowledgement of the pressures GP practices face."

"The rapidly expanding population, additional demand from those living longer with complex long-term health conditions and recruitment issues all present real challenges for GP practices."

"Change is urgently needed to address these, both in the near and long-term, so that there is a sustainable future for primary care services. Patients too have an important role to play and, by choosing self-care first and the most appropriate health service for their needs, this can make a positive difference."

John Stammers, chairman of NHS Great Yarmouth Clinical Commissioning Group and a GP at Sole Bay Health Centre in Southwold, added: "We are pleased that NHS England has recognised the huge challenges which general practice is facing as a result of budget shortages, increases in demand and difficulties recruiting new doctors and nurses."

"We welcome the plans to address these areas which have been outlined today, and look forward to hearing more detail about the impact this announcement will have on patients in Great Yarmouth and Waveney."

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Billy McKee, Suffolk GP

in the next five years as well as 3,000 mental health therapists and 1,500 clinical pharmacists.

Dr McKee said Suffolk was "in a good place to take this forward" because of the work of Suffolk's GP federation and its clinical commissioning groups.

Simon Rudland, media lead with the federation, said the organisation had tried to recruit more GPs in the county by marketing the region as an attractive destination for professionals to live and work. The federation also offers schemes for young doctors to develop their skills in a variety of fields and to work abroad before returning to Suffolk.

Dr Rudland welcomed the funding offer, which he said was a recognition of the importance of supporting primary care.

"If primary care fails it has a huge impact on costs elsewhere in the system, so spending money on general practice makes a lot of sense because you get great value for money," he added.

However he warned that new funding packages could get "clogged up in the system" and stressed the need to "put the accountable people on the spot" so that the money found its way to Suffolk.

Central Suffolk and North Ipswich

■ GP Billy McKee says Suffolk has done the work needed to move things forward when the funding arrives



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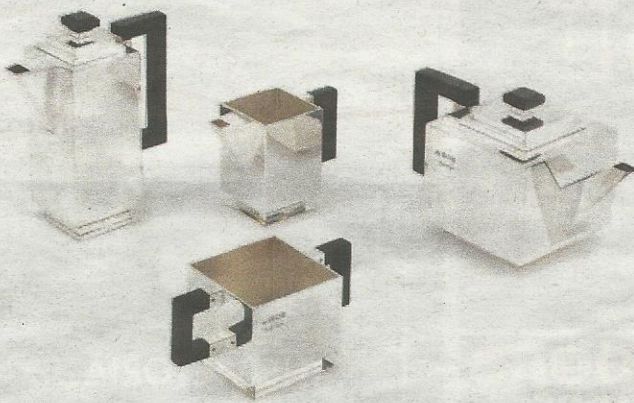
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