

NHS to prioritise doctors' mental health

NHS chief Simon Stevens today announced a new mental health support scheme to cover all doctors working in the NHS.

Speaking at a conference on 'Wounded Healers', Simon Stevens announced national funding for a new scheme for all NHS doctors in England, covering approximately 110,000 more doctors, in addition to those already supported.

This builds on the success of NHS England's nationally funded programme for GPs and trainees suffering from mental health issues that was launched in early 2017. Over 1,500 GPs have already been treated by this confidential NHS GP Health Service. Three quarters of doctors supported in this way are able to return to work.

This support comes at a time when the NHS is working to grow the number of doctors by expanding medical school places by 25%, by successfully recruiting record numbers of new doctors onto the GP training scheme, and by stepping up international recruitment including from Australia.

The NHS long term plan, due to publish this autumn, will contain a renewed focus on mental health of both patients and staff. It will also consider the distinctive needs of other staff groups in the NHS.

The current service for GPs has shown itself to be highly valued, with a recent survey suggesting 93% of patients were likely to recommend the service to others; 88% said it had a positive or very positive impact on their wellbeing and 78% of doctors said it had a positive or very positive impact on their ability to continue working. Currently support for the mental health of hospital doctors falls to NHS Trusts or NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) but there are large gaps in support.

NHS England chief executive Simon Stevens said: "The NHS is significantly improving mental health treatment for patients, but sometimes their doctors need our support too. This new funding will help all NHS doctors by providing a safe, confidential non-stigmatising service to turn to when they are struggling and need help. It means the NHS will now have the most comprehensive national mental health support offer to doctors of any

country's health system in the world. Ultimately it will be patients and not just their doctors who will benefit."

Dr Clare Gerada, medical director of the NHS Practitioner Health Programme, and former chair of the Royal College of GPs said: "The last taboo in the NHS is the acknowledgement that doctors also have mental health problems and that they are not immune to the pressures we all face. "We have shown that if you offer an accessible, confidential service then doctors will come for treatment, and not just come, they get better.

"I'm delighted Simon Stevens has announced extra funding to make this service available nationally, so doctors outside of London can access the support they need."

Mr Stevens made the announcement to make the [NHS Practitioner Health Programme](#) available across England at a conference to mark the tenth anniversary of the scheme. The new service will be procured openly beginning over the next six months.