

## Paper 5

Healthwatch Rutland  
The King Centre  
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██████████  
By Email

Dear ██████████

Thank you for your question to the Board, sent by email and copied here:

*How do you intend to solve the lack of GP's available particularly in Oakham? At the present time we have only one surgery in the Town of Oakham, which has plans for many new homes with young families, as well as three recently built elderly care homes.*

*At the time of writing, we have only 5 doctors, (not all full time), at the one and only Oakham surgery with over 16,000 patients. To get the 21st health care we need in the community for all patients, with these ratios is impossible. It is creating a very difficult situation, which is not being addressed. And a lot of frustration and anger in the community.*

The Board does not seek to justify or condone the issues that a lot of Oakham Medical Practice (OMP) patients have encountered but would like to, first, set out some of the difficulties being experienced by General Practice.

The number of fully qualified full time equivalent GPs in England has dropped by 10% since 2015 despite the Government's stated aspiration to have increased GP numbers by 5000 by 2020. At the same time, the number of registered patients has increased by nearly 3.2m over the last 5 years. The problems of access are nationwide and not limited to Rutland and some areas are in a worse position than ours. GPs and the whole health and care system are under tremendous pressure.

The remit of Healthwatch Rutland is to listen and inform the public and those who commission and deliver our care. We listen to you and reflect your voices and concerns back to health and care providers, commissioners and, if necessary, the Care Quality Commission. Unfortunately, we are not empowered to build or demand new surgeries or solve such problems.

That said, we at HWR have been working on the OMP access difficulties for a long time. We regularly meet with our commissioner and providers of our health and care services and have been flagging up patient difficulties and frustrations with OMP. We have spoken at length with OMP, Rutland County Council, The Primary Care Network (PCN), Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), and anybody else who will listen. In addition to access difficulties, we have also been actively promoting ideas and suggestions for improvements such as removing the need to ring at 8am for an appointment and the long, recorded message, unlocking the surgery doors, a PCN-wide Public and Patient Group, changes to the Practice website, improved communications - to name but a few.

Over the last 2 years or so we have also carried out three pieces of research looking specifically at the public experiences of primary care in Rutland and highlighted the challenges faced by patients.

But highlighting the problems without actions by the System is not enough. So, we have also called for and looked over CCG emerging actions for improving primary care across LLR. Some of these plans are being put into place but we have no firm evidence base yet which supports any conclusions about whether things are improving. HWR has, though, been receiving fewer complaints in recent weeks.

The public can also help! First, please contact HWR directly (anonymously if preferred but being able to pass on a name to the health and care system always adds weight to any communication) or contact commissioners and providers directly to express your frustrations and/or describe your experiences. Second, patients can also help by being prepared to see other members of the practice multidisciplinary team such as a pharmacist, physiotherapist, nurse or advanced practitioner. Third, if patients can treat minor, time-limited illnesses, such as colds or flu, at home with over-the-counter remedies, they will relieve some of the pressures and leave appointments for those who need to be seen by a GP.

This is a complex issue and so I would like to invite you to an engagement meeting where we will be feeding back a more in-depth update about our recent work on the '*Let's Talk ... GP Access*' project and measures being taken to hopefully improve patients' experiences. This will be in the New Year and details, once finalised, will be on our website.

Sincerely,



Dr Janet Underwood  
Chair, Healthwatch Rutland