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PULSE

Date: 30 August 2022

Dear Mr Swann,

Thank you for taking time to speak to Pulse earlier this year. It was a fascinating chat and I know our readers – especially those in Northern Ireland – appreciated it.

I am contacting you this time about a major investigation we recently conducted on GP practice closures. For the first time, we examined all the practices that had closed permanently. We defined this as practices or branch surgeries that have closed, and a GP surgery no longer stands at that postcode.

Across the UK, we found there were 474 practices that filled this criteria. As a result of these closures, 1.49m patients were displaced. In Northern Ireland, this amounted to at least 11 surgeries affecting at least 18,000 patients. Of course, we are well aware of the problems affecting Fermanagh and Portadown, and most recently Belfast.

Our findings were interesting. We found:

· For more than 40% of the 162 surgeries we identified triggers for, recruitment issues were the final straw for the practice;

· These surgeries had markedly smaller list sizes than average – a median list size of 2,738.

· They were in postcodes that had a markedly lower median deprivation score than other surgeries – a score of 3.81 compared with 4.41 (with 1 being most deprived and 10 being least deprived);

· Using English data, 69% of practices that closed for good received lower funding per patient the last full financial year before they closed than the average funding for that financial year;

· A number of surgeries have closed with no other surgery within miles.

I am sure these findings would be of interest to you. I am happy to share our full data and methodology if you so wish.

I would also love an opportunity to talk you through these findings, and discuss some ideas around how we can mitigate this and support GPs and patients alike.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Jaimie Kaffash,
Editor, Pulse