

Investigating burnout in general practitioners and indicators of suboptimal patient care

Background and rationale

This is the first large quantitative study to be undertaken nationally that investigates burnout in general practitioners (GPs). Evidence suggests that more than one third of GPs at some point in their lives feel emotionally exhausted, have difficulties in showing empathy and undervalue their achievements (this is called 'burnout'). Although recent studies suggest that burnout is largely a consequence of workplace problems, we do not know how to prevent burnout in GPs. No previous study has examined the factors associated with burnout and its link with less safe patient care in general practices.

This research is being conducted by the Division of Population Health, Health Services Research & Primary Care, the University of Manchester in collaboration with the Royal College of General Practitioners Research Surveillance Centre (RCGP RSC), University of Surrey. The objectives of this study is to identify characteristics of GPs and practices associated with burnout in GPs, understand the link between burnout and patient safety in general practices, and confirm the need to regularly assess and mitigate burnout for improving patient safety and prevent turnover of GPs from general practices.

What is the design of this study?

GPs working in 70 general practices will complete a brief bespoke questionnaire which will assess burnout. This will be administered by the RCGP RSC to ensure the anonymity of the participating GPs and practices. Routinely collected primary care data in the RCGP RSC will be linked with bespoke questionnaire responses of GPs. As a complementary research approach the GP responses in the national GP Worklife Survey will be analysed.