

DATA CHART

# UK falls behind in international league for doctor numbers

The UK has fewer doctors per head of population than most other countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), figures published by the organisation show.

Out of the 33 countries for which the OECD has provided data, the UK ranks 22nd. The only European countries with fewer doctors per head of population are Slovenia and Poland (see fig 1).

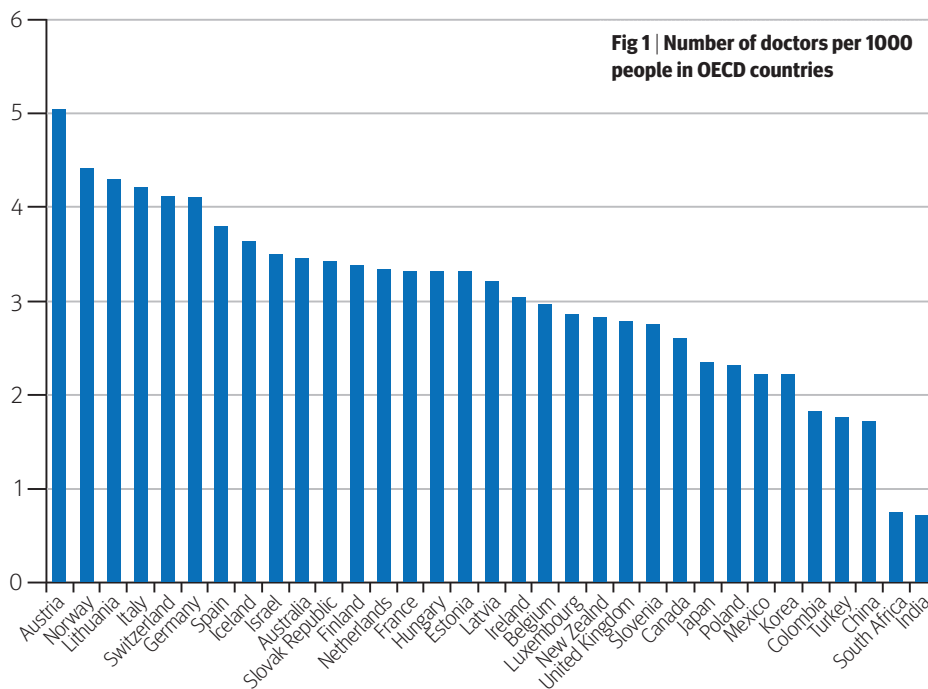
According to the figures, the UK has 2.8 doctors for every 1000 people. The average across the 33 countries is 3.0. Austria has 5.1 doctors for every 1000 people. Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, and Switzerland all have more than four doctors for every 1000 people.

Since 1960, however, the number of doctors per head of population in the UK has risen more than five times faster than the rate of growth of the population as a whole (fig 2).

The number of doctors per head of population has more than tripled since 1960 when there were 0.85 doctors for every 1000 people. This equates to a cumulative rise of 307% and an average annual increase of around 2.2%. Over the same period, the UK population has grown by 23% cumulatively, equivalent to an average annual increase of 0.38% (fig 3).

There are 35 member countries in the OECD. The organisation acts as a forum to allow governments to work together to share experiences and seek solutions to common problems.

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The only European countries with fewer doctors per head of population than the UK are Slovenia and Poland

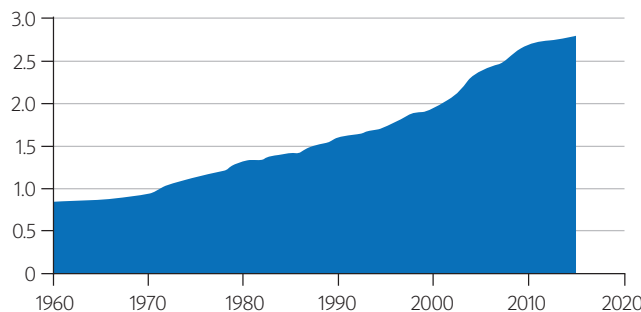


Fig 2 | Number of doctors per head of population in the UK by year

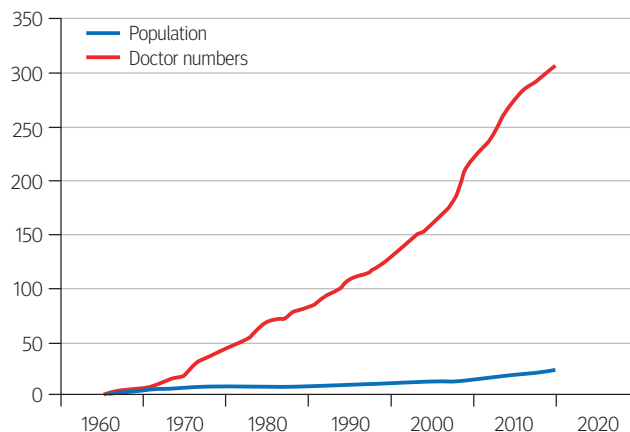


Fig 3 | Cumulative annual percentage rise in doctor numbers v UK population





Wendy Burn, 58, is a consultant old age psychiatrist at Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and president elect of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. She will take over from the current president, Simon Wessely, at the end of June. She knows the ropes, as she was dean of the college from 2011 to 2016. She says that, while a lot of good work has been done for patients with dementia, older people with depression and anxiety need more support. This will be a focus of her presidency, along with increasing mental health funding, promoting integration of physical and mental healthcare, recruiting and retaining more psychiatrists, increasing acute bed capacity, improving services for children, and cutting bureaucracy.

## BMJ CONFIDENTIAL

# Wendy Burn On Ilkley Moor with cats

### What was your earliest ambition?

I decided that I wanted to be a doctor at age 2. Both of my parents were doctors, so this was probably an influence, although my sister is a film producer.

### Who has been your biggest inspiration?

My mother. She was the first person in her family to go to university and trained as a doctor in the 1940s. She taught me that women can have it all.

### What was the worst mistake in your career?

I'm so happy with how it turned out that I wouldn't change anything.

### Who is the person you would most like to thank, and why?

My husband, who has always supported me in my career and heats up his own ready meals without complaint (though I do cook at the weekends). He's the medical director for education and training, clinical radiology, at the Royal College of Radiologists, so understands college work and how all consuming it can be.

### To whom would you most like to apologise?

My children, as I worked full time throughout their childhood. It would've been nice to spend more time with them.

### Where are or when were you happiest?

At our house in Ilkley, Yorkshire, with my two cats.

### What unheralded change has made the most difference to your field?

Drugs for treating dementia. They aren't a cure, but they definitely slow down the disease and give some hope to patients and carers.

### Do you support doctor assisted suicide?

This is very difficult. There's no doubt that some people live too long. Both of my parents did, my father with dementia. But could I kill anyone? I don't think so.

### What, if anything, are you doing to reduce your carbon footprint?

I recycle as much as I can and keep the heating low. And I use the train rather than driving, whenever possible.

### What personal ambition do you still have?

None—I've gone far beyond any ambitions that I ever held.

### Where does alcohol fit into your life?

I can live without it, but I do enjoy a nice cold glass of pinot grigio after work.

### What is your pet hate?

Management speak: "going forward," "reach out." I often read documents so full of jargon that I have no idea what they actually mean, if anything.

### What would be on the menu for your last supper?

Tapas from La Casita, our local restaurant in Ilkley, with a double portion of the salted caramel parfait for pudding.

### Do you have any regrets about becoming a doctor?

Absolutely none. It's such a privilege. Treating depression is particularly satisfying: what could be better than making a sad person happy?

### If you weren't in your present position what would you be doing instead?

I've no idea. I've never seriously considered being anything other than a psychiatrist.

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