

DATA CHART

Doctors' sickness absence rate is a third of other hospital staff

On average, hospital doctors were absent because of sickness on 1.3% of the days on which they were scheduled to work in 2016/17. Doctors in training had an average annual sickness rate of 1.1%, and the average rate among consultants was 1.2%. This compares with an average annual sickness absence rate of 4.2% for all NHS hospital staff, 4.5% for nurses, and 5.5% for ambulance workers.

Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for 2016 recorded an absence rate across all workers in the health sector of 3.5%. This compares with an average rate of 2.9% across the public sector and 1.7% in the private sector. In its analysis of these data, the ONS says, "It is possible that the exposure of health workers to infections and diseases contributes to their higher sickness absence rate."

The ONS data show that, across all UK workers, minor illnesses, such as coughs and colds, were the most common reason for sickness absence in 2016. These accounted for 25% of the total days lost. The next most common reasons were musculoskeletal problems, accounting for 22% of days lost.

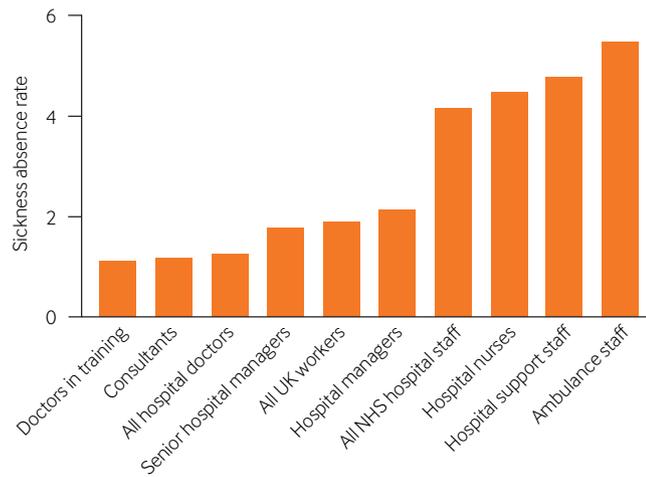
Rates of sickness absence among NHS workers vary through the year, with lower rates in the summer and higher rates over the winter. Among doctors, absence rates are highest in December and January (an average of 1.3% in these months between 2010 and 2017) and lowest in August (an average of 1.0% between 2010 and 2017).

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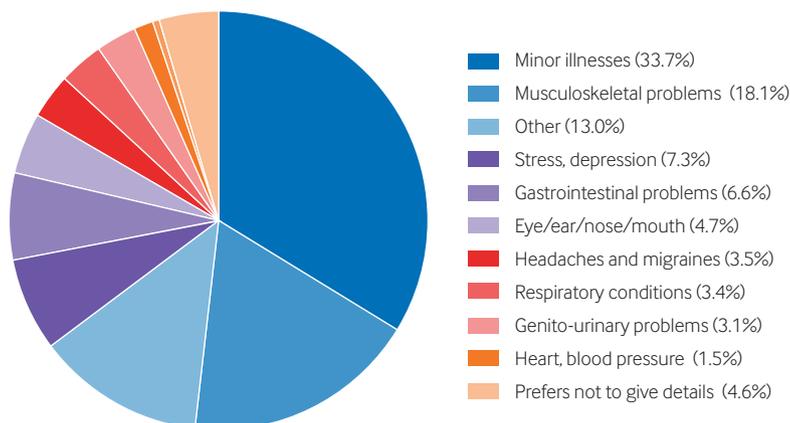


Sickness absence rates among NHS staff and other workers



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Percentage of sickness absences in 2016





Andrew Goddard, 50, will become president of the Royal College of Physicians in September, the youngest for more than 400 years. Now a consultant gastroenterologist at the Royal Derby Hospital, he grew up in Plymouth and southeast London and qualified at Cambridge. He will continue to do the acute take at weekends and overnight so he can “tell it as it is,” he declared in his address to RCP fellows. His research focuses on iron deficiency and bowel cancer screening, and his tone is upbeat: “Medicine is brilliant.” He wants to see medical student numbers double and a reassertion of consultant autonomy.

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Andrew Goddard Brilliant dreamer

What was your earliest ambition?

To follow in the footsteps of *Quincy ME* and be a forensic pathologist. David Rubenstein in Cambridge converted me to hospital medicine.

What was your best career move?

Moving to Nottingham to do gastroenterology. I followed my wife and have never looked back.

What was the worst mistake in your career?

Not checking urea and electrolytes in a young man taking long term mesalazine for ulcerative colitis. He developed renal failure.

How is your work-life balance?

Medicine was a way of life for me when I started out, and it still is. I'm lucky to have a fantastically supportive family who let me play hard as well as work hard.

How do you keep fit and healthy?

Cycling—although the tea stops and post-ride beer undo most of the good work.

What single change would you like to see made to the NHS?

For it to be planned for the long term, not just the next election.

Do doctors get paid enough?

Yes, although we must reward those in medicine who go above and beyond. This doesn't have to be a financial reward: “headspace” is worth its weight in gold.

To whom would you most like to apologise?

My wife and kids, for not telling them how much I love and value them enough.

What living doctor do you most admire, and why?

Gervase Kerrigan, my boss at West Suffolk Hospital, for showing me that thoughtfulness, kindness, and diligence are the hallmarks of a great physician.

What is the worst job you have done?

As a junior lab technician, measuring faecal fats in patients with malabsorption.

What unheralded change has made the most difference in your field?

Modern endoscopy equipment and polypectomy techniques.

What new technology or development are you most looking forward to?

Easy appraisal tools that actually work.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Reading *2000 AD* every week, as I have done since it was first published in 1977.

What personal ambition do you still have?

To be a good RCP president.

What is your pet hate?

Rude, lazy, and vexatious people.

Is the thought of retirement a dream or a nightmare?

I look forward to retirement, but I plan to wind down to it over a few years.

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

Celebrating my fifth green jacket at the Masters golf tournament. It's not just retirement that's a dream.

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