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Covid-19: GP staff have faced threats and abuse during vaccination programme, poll finds

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Over half (52%) of GP practice staff have received threats of physical abuse while working on the covid-19 vaccination programme, a survey has found.

The poll of 222 GP practice staff by the Medical Protection Society (MPS) also found that over half (53%) of staff said that their surgery or vaccination centre had been defaced by anti-vaccination material. The survey included GPs, nurses, and practice managers at surgeries in the UK.

One respondent said, “Staff of all disciplines are leaving the profession in droves because of the behaviour of the public creating unbearable working situations. Morale is the lowest I have ever known, anyone near retirement is retiring early.” Another said, “Abuse—especially written and posted in the prescription box on the gate—has resulted in staff being very concerned for their safety at the surgery.”

Two thirds of survey respondents (60%) said that abuse and complaints relating to the covid-19 vaccination programme had impacted on their own or their team’s mental wellbeing. A further 71% said that the increased workload resulting from the programme has affected wellbeing.

Pallavi Bradshaw, medicolegal lead for risk prevention at MPS, said that GP practices had borne the brunt of patient frustrations with the vaccination programme. “GPs are mentally and physically exhausted, with the risk of disillusionment and burnout higher than ever,” Bradshaw said. “Wellbeing support must be provided to all GP surgery staff who are feeling overwhelmed and demoralised, and a zero tolerance policy of abuse must be enforced across the NHS so healthcare workers feel their safety is a priority.”