



GP leaders unite in calling for inspections of surgeries to be suspended

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The BMA and the Royal College of General Practitioners have both called for the current inspection regime of general practices to be suspended.

Delegates at the BMA's annual representative meeting this week overwhelmingly passed a motion describing the healthcare inspectorate the Care Quality Commission (CQC) as "unfit for purpose." On the same day the royal college said that a pause in inspections was needed to relieve the pressure on surgeries, which it warned were "on the brink of meltdown."

The motion at the BMA meeting asserted that the CQC had continued to damage the morale and professionalism of all doctors and had failed to deliver the tasks it was set. Speaking at the meeting in Liverpool on 23 June, Chaand Nagpaul, chair of the BMA's General Practitioners Committee, said, "The GP committee has been voicing significant concerns about the CQC's operation, particularly the overly bureaucratic and often nitpicking assessments that are wasting days of valuable GP and staff time that could be being spent on treating patients. The current regime is incurring huge costs of several hundred million pounds annually."

Nagpaul said that many of the inspection reports were of "questionable clinical value" that told patients little about the quality of care being provided. "Even worse, they have the potential to mislead the public and do not encourage ongoing quality improvement," he said.

At the end of last year the BMA lobbied for the risk assessment system for rating general practices to be dropped after the CQC had to apologise to 60 practices for wrongly prioritising them for inspection.¹ The bandings were eventually dropped in March this year. However, Nagpaul said that little progress had been made since then to sort out other problems at the CQC.

"We will be writing to the government and CQC asking for an urgent meeting to cease the current inspection process, in the wake of the ARM's [annual representative meeting's] decision, which backs an earlier vote taken at the local medical committee conference in May," he said. "GPs and their patients have waited far too long for an evidence based, proportionate, inspection process that facilitates trust among the profession and is one that the public can have confidence in."

In an open letter to England's health secretary, the chair of the Royal College of General Practitioners, Maureen Baker, warned that the burden being placed on GPs by the CQC inspection regime and pressure to provide seven day access for routine care were undermining efforts to turn around the crisis in general practice.

"We believe that the time has come to conduct an urgent review of the CQC's regulatory regime, to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy, and to ensure that it reflects the distinctive nature of general practice and focuses on what matters most to patients," wrote Baker.

"Whilst this takes place, we call for the CQC's programme of routine inspections to be halted on a temporary basis, as a means of alleviating the pressures on general practice which have now reached such an extent that they are giving rise to serious patient safety concerns. "

¹ Kmiotowicz Z. Regulator apologises to 60 general practices for wrongly prioritising them for inspection. *BMJ* 2014;349:g7564.

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