

Reclaiming general practice: tackling our workforce crisis with WiseGP

We won't address our workforce crisis by just doing more of the same. Expanding both existing training programmes and recruitment and retention schemes with the same offer won't work because it is the [job itself that is contributing to that crisis](#). We urgently need to reform the job of General Practice.

I have long argued that we must update professional training, practice design and healthcare policy to better recognise and support the distinct role that GPs are uniquely placed to offer in primary medical care – the practice of [advanced generalist medicine](#).

In my twenty years of [studying medical generalism](#), I have seen it being designed out of medical practice, teaching and healthcare policy. I have witnessed, and researched, the negative impact of these changes on patients, professionals, and healthcare delivery. So, in response, I now lead and help deliver work to restore and reclaim the [wisdom of general and generalist practice](#). At the heart of that work is a goal to recognise and restore the distinct [knowledge work](#) of general and generalist practice.

So what do I mean? [Knowledge work](#) is the work we do to make sense of and deal with the complex problems we see in daily practice – the things that can't be neatly fitted into a pathway, protocol or algorithm. In other words, the essence of what we do – every day. Knowledge workers need to know a lot, but more importantly they must have the [skills to critically, creatively adapt and apply what they know](#) in context. Knowing the latest guidelines on hypertension management, for example, isn't enough. We must also have the skills, confidence and [practice-level support](#) necessary for us to decide if, when, and how to apply what we know to meet the needs of the person sat in front of us.

In other sectors, [knowledge workers are a prized asset](#) – recognised as a necessary resource if organisations are to meet complex goals. The [World Economic Forum](#) recently described that the two most important skills for future workers are creative thinking and analytical thinking. My research has shown that developing skills and confidence in knowledge work is an [important motivator for professional practice](#). Yet in general practice, there is a relentless trend to replace knowledge workers with so-called information workers. GPs are increasingly contracted to simply collect the information required by externally defined goals; and package it up to be processed and analysed elsewhere – whether by a digital algorithm or faceless referral pathway.

Take the example of a patient presenting with the effects of Long Covid. As an [advanced generalist clinician, and a skilled knowledge worker](#), I work with my patient to explore their problems, co-construct an explanation that guides a management plan, put that into action and then meet to evaluate and – if necessary – amend that plan. This is advanced generalist practice, a GP role that too often is unrecognised and so undervalued by healthcare contracts and systems. Suppose my patient and I recognise that s/he needs additional help not available in primary care (eg speech therapy), then I refer. However my referral is rejected because 'the chest xray result is 1 week out of date' My detailed letter outlining my generalist assessment (my knowledge work) has been ignored. Instead, I have been treated as an information worker, my work rejected, and my referral refused. Both I, and my patient, are left frustrated and demoralised.

We urgently need to reverse the relentless trend to undermine the knowledge work of general practice in the interests of patients and practitioners alike. I set up [WiseGP](#) to do just that.

My new book, [Medical Generalism, Now!](#) describes a blueprint for action. With multiple partners, we are implementing work to [champion, build and sustain the knowledge work](#) of front-line general practice. We run the [CATALYST](#) programme to tackle professional development; we are changing practice set up within the [TIMES](#) project; and our national [WiseGP](#) programme brings together key voices and resources for change.

Tackling the workforce crisis and reclaiming general practice needs the collective action and voice of the profession. We need this voice to be visible in the policy conversations happening in Integrated Care Boards and healthcare organisations around the NHS, as well as in the manifesto pledges that will be emerging in the coming months. So, we will shortly be launching a WiseGP Action Group. [Sign up for our WiseGP newsletter](#) to hear how you can join the group and become part of the work to Reclaim General Practice.