GPs under pressure as A&E waits worst for a decade

6 January 2015, GP Online

GP leaders warned that rising pressure on general practice was 'inevitable' after official NHS data revealed A&E waiting times are at their worst level in a decade.

Wessex LMCs chief executive Dr Nigel Watson told GP that practices were seeing the same increase in workload as A&E services.

'We are in a situation where the NHS is like a balloon, where every part is under pressure. If you poke one part of the system, it bulges out somewhere else,' he said.

Huge pressure on GP practices could leave some patients who should be seeking help in primary care going to A&E instead.

'Quite a lot of the stuff that goes to A&E should really be seen in a GP practice. There are about 20m visits a year to A&E and general practice sees 340m – if there is just a 1% shift or even less it has a huge impact on A&E,' he warned.

Dr Watson argued that too little of the winter pressures funding allocated by the government had been targeted at supporting out of hours GP providers, which could have helped ease pressure on A&E.

Patients will switch

Dr Watson said it was inevitable that as publicity of pressure on A&E emerged and patients heard that waiting times were long in A&E, more patients would switch back to general practice.

He added that the pressure could leave some patients seeking help in GP practices when they were genuine A&E cases.

Dr Watson called for more education for patients about when a visit to A&E was appropriate, and GP-led triage in hospitals.

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