

Review of the Community Pharmacist Workforce in England

The CCA is aware of discrepancies in data used to identify the number of pharmacists in the community pharmacy workforce in England. We are concerned that important policy decisions may be based on inaccurate data. This paper uses the best available data to outline our understanding of recent changes to the community pharmacist workforce.

Our research indicates that the community pharmacy workforce is in a fragile state. Over the last 5 years a shortfall of over 3,000 community pharmacists has developed in England.

Pharmacists on the register

The number of pharmacists listed on the GPhC register has steadily increased from 53,967 in March 2017 to 60,815 in December 2021^[1].

A survey conducted by the GPhC in 2019 found that 82% of pharmacist registrants work in England and of these 62% work in community settings^[2]. We have used these numbers throughout to estimate the number of pharmacists working in England and the number of community pharmacists working in England.

The number of community pharmacists is increasing

- New Registrants:** In typical years the GPhC registration assessments take place in June and September. The covid pandemic resulted in significant disruption and both 2020 assessments were delayed until 2021. For the five years prior to the pandemic (March 2014-March 2019) on average 2,775 new pharmacists joined the register each year (see Appendix A & B). Based on the assumption that 82% of registrants work in England and 62% work in community, we calculate that each year around 2,276 new pharmacists started working in England, and of these around **1,411** started working in community settings.
- Net change in registrants:** Between March 2017 and December 2021, the calculated number of community pharmacists in England grew from 27,437 to 30,918 or by 3,481. This represents a 12.7% increase. It equates to an average net growth (accounting for joiners and leavers) of just **733 per year**. (Appendix C)



Other factors at play

Despite an increase in the number of pharmacists, many contractors report an increase in pharmacist vacancies. This is reflected in the Health Education England workforce survey from 2021 which shows vacancies rates have **more than doubled** since 2017. Contractors also report significant increases in locum hourly pay rates. This rise indicates that demand is exceeding supply, and the increased costs are exacerbating workforce pressures. We know there are other factors at play, including:

1. Changing work patterns
2. High vacancy rates among pharmacy support staff
3. Recruitment into Primary Care Networks (PCNs)

1. Changing working patterns

The latest data supports previous anecdotal evidence of a changing approach to work. We have heard that this is driven by increased part time working, reduced working hours and portfolio working.

- The 2017 HEE workforce survey found the average number of pharmacists by headcount per store was 1.97.^[3]
- The 2021 HEE workforce survey reported this figure had increased to 2.43.^[4]
- This means on average each store had 0.46 more pharmacists.

When accounting for a decrease in the no. of pharmacies (from 11,832 in 2017 to 11,279 in 2021)^[5], we estimate an additional 4,099 pharmacists. This means around **1,025** more pharmacists are required *each year* to retain equilibrium.

2. High vacancy rates among pharmacy support staff

Community pharmacists do not work in isolation. They are part of a team. The HEE 2021 workforce survey found growing vacancies rate among support staff. This undoubtedly will have an impact on the workload of pharmacists. Particularly at a time when pharmacy teams are being asked to do more.

Headcount vacancy rates are indicated below ^[4].

- Accuracy checkers: 19%
- Trainee dispensing assistants: 13%
- Medicine counter assistants: 12%
- Trainee medicine counter assistants: 17%

3. Recruitment in Primary Care Networks (PCNs)

The GP contract includes a reimbursement scheme for additional roles. February 2020 set out intentions to recruit an estimated 6 FTE pharmacists per Primary Care Network [6].

In December 2021, NHS E/I confirmed that around 3,500 pharmacists have been recruited into PCNs with an estimated 2,100 recruited from community pharmacy. Assuming 62% of pharmacists work in community pharmacy (and discounting the 9% of pharmacists already working in primary care), we would expect around **2,385** to have come from the community setting.

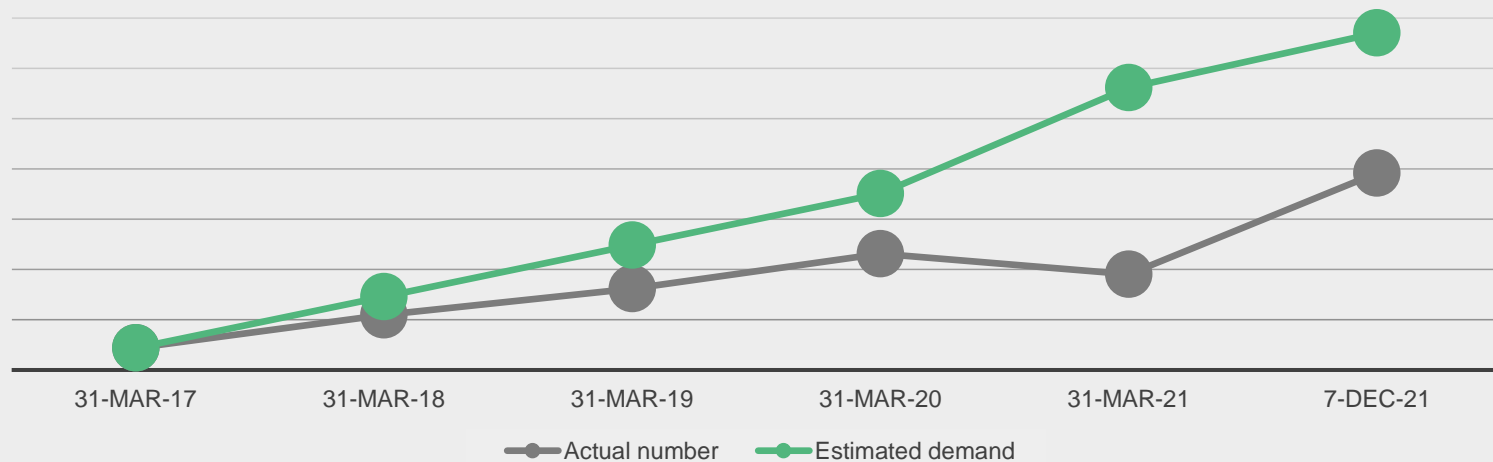
Between March 2020 and December 2021, the number of community pharmacists in England grew by around **1,609**. This means the calculated number of community pharmacists recruited into PCNs was **48%** greater than the increase in the community pharmacist working in England on the GPhC register.

What else should be considered?

These calculations give an indication of some of factors effecting the community pharmacy workforce. They do not account for:

- Growing numbers of pharmacists not practising
- Increased workload as a result of the pandemic
- The impact of broader portfolio working
- Population growth
- Cross border working
- Data represents a “snapshot” or a moment in time

Community pharmacists in England (March 2017-December 2021)



This graph shows that between March 2017 and December 2021 demand for community pharmacists outstripped supply. The “actual number” is the estimated number of pharmacists on the GPhC register working in community pharmacies in England (see Appendix B). The “estimated demand” figure is based on additional demand caused by pharmacists being employed by PCNs and growth in the number of pharmacists employed in each store. (See Appendix D).

What does this mean?

The community pharmacy workforce is already a fragile system.

- Over the last 5 years there has been a net growth of **733** community pharmacists in England a year.
- Based on HEE data, we calculate that between 2017 and 2021 an additional **4,099** additional community pharmacists were required to maintain an equilibrium in stores - averaging **1,025** pharmacists a year.
- This **erodes** net growth to around **-292** community pharmacists a year, meaning more community pharmacists are needed.

Between March 2017 and December 2021 there was a shortfall of more than 3,000 community pharmacists in England

- The number of community pharmacists in England grew by **3,481** between March 2017 and Dec 2021.
- Changing working practices meant an additional **4,099** additional pharmacists were required to maintain an equilibrium in stores.
- Between March 2020 and Dec 2021, **2,385** community pharmacists were recruited into PCNs.
- In total this means **6,484** additional community pharmacists were needed to maintain the balance.
- This is around 3,000 more than the estimated number of Community Pharmacists in England who joined the GPhC register during this period.

Appendix A: Pharmacists joining and leaving the register for five years prior to the pandemic

| Date | Total Pharmacists [at 31 March] | New registrants: June assessment [7] | New registrants: September assessment [8] | Total new registrants | Number leaving |
|----------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|-----------------------|----------------|
| Mar-19 | 56,288 | 2128 | 731 | 2859 | -1496 |
| Mar-18 | 55,258 | 2318 | 544 | 2862 | -1832 |
| Mar-17 | 53,967 | 2208 | 481 | 2689 | -1398 |
| Mar-16 | 51,906 | 2672 | 269 | 2941 | -880 |
| Mar-15 | 50,292 | 2077 | 626 | 2703 | -1089 |
| Mar-14 | 49,000 | 2175 | 423 | 2598 | -1306 |
| Average | | 2,263 | 521 | 2,775 | 1,334 |

Appendix B: Change in total community pharmacists in England

| Date | Number of Pharmacist registrants [1] | Estimated number of Pharmacists in England [2] | Y/Y change Pharmacists in England | Estimated number of Community Pharmacists in England [2] | Y/Y change CP in England | Y/Y change Community Pharmacists in England (%) |
|--------|--------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|--------------------------|---|
| Dec-21 | 60,815 | 49,868 | 3,250 | 30,918 | 2015 | 7.0% |
| Mar-21 | 56,851 | 46,618 | -656 | 28,903 | -407 | -1.4% |
| Mar-20 | 57,651 | 47,274 | 1,118 | 29,310 | 693 | 2.4% |
| Mar-19 | 56,288 | 46,156 | 845 | 28,617 | 524 | 1.8% |
| Mar-18 | 55,258 | 45,312 | 1,059 | 28,093 | 656 | 2.3% |
| Mar-17 | 53,967 | 44,253 | 1,690 | 27,437 | 1048 | 3.8% |

Appendix C: Estimated growth between March 2017 and December 2021

| Date | Number of Pharmacist registrants [1] | Estimated number of Community Pharmacists in England [2] | Growth of Community Pharmacists in England between March 2017 and December 2021 (%) | Growth of Community Pharmacists in England between March 2017 and December 2021 (number) | Average Y/Y growth between March 2017 and December 2021 (number)* |
|--------|--------------------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Dec-21 | 60,815 | 30,918 | +12.7% | +3,481 | +733 |
| Mar-17 | 53,967 | 27,437 | | | |

*Calculates average growth across 4.75 years

Appendix D: Increased demand for pharmacists March 2017 and December 2021

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|---------------------|--|--------|
| Supply | Estimated growth in Community Pharmacists in England on GPhC register (March 2017 - Dec 2021) | 3,481 |
| Demand | Estimated number of Community Pharmacists recruited into PCNs | 2,385 |
| Demand | Increased demand based on increased headcount per store (based on HEE survey in 2017 and 2021) | 4,099 |
| Total demand | PCN recruitment plus increased headcount change per store | 6,484 |
| Impact | Estimated number of new community pharmacists in England minus increased demand | -3,003 |

REFERENCES

- [1] Number of Pharmacists on the GPhC register
 - Dec-21: Data was provided by GPhC on December 7th 2021
 - Mar-21: GPhC, [Annual report 2020/21](#), March 2021
 - Mar-20: GPhC, [Annual report 2019/20](#), March 2020
 - Mar-19: GPhC, [Annual report 2018/19](#), March 2019
 - Mar-18: GPhC, [Annual report 2017/18](#), March 2018
 - Mar-17: GPhC, [Annual report 2016/17](#), March 2017
- [2] GPhC, [Survey of registered pharmacy professionals](#), 2019
- [3] HEE, [Workforce survey 2017](#), 2017 (page 15)
- [4] HEE, [Workforce survey 2021](#), 2022 (page 22)
- [5] No. of pharmacies is based on number of pharmacies utilised by HEE is workforce survey analysis in 2017 and 2021 respectively
- [6] BMA and NHS E, [Update to the GP contract agreement 2020-2021-2023/24](#), February 2020
- [7] GPhC, [GPhC announces results for the first-ever online registration assessment](#), April 2021 (see for June assessment results 2014-2019)
- [8] GPhC, Assessment results – September (2014-2019)
 - 2019: [GPhC announces results for September 2019 registration assessment](#), October 2019
 - 2018: [GPhC announces results from the September 2018 registration assessment](#), October 2018
 - 2017: [Results from September registration assessment announced](#), October 2017
 - 2016: [Results of September 2016 registration assessment](#), October 2016
 - 2015: [GPhC announces results of September 2015 registration assessment](#), October 2015