

The clinical oncology UK workforce census 2018

These key findings highlight the growing workforce crisis in clinical oncology

VACANT

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There has been a

2x

increase in the number of vacant clinical oncologist roles over the last five years

Almost

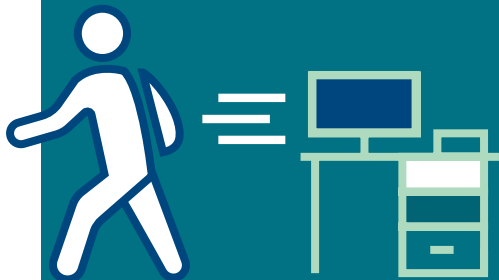
1 in 4

full-time consultants are contracted to work over 48 hours per week, with many doing additional unpaid overtime



The number of consultants leaving the profession each year is forecast to increase from 3.6% to

4.6% by 2023



The current **18%**

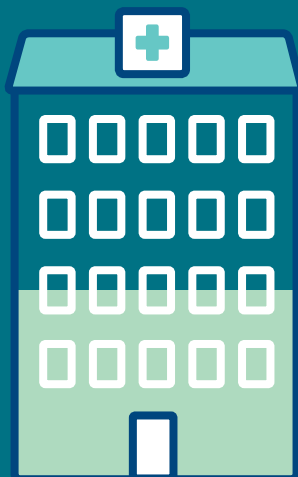
shortfall in consultant clinical oncologists is forecast to increase to

22% by 2023

The UK needs

2x

the current number of trainees to meet the minimum number of clinical oncologists needed for 2023



1 in 6

UK cancer centres now have fewer consultants working for them than five years ago

Incentivising those planning to retire to leave at age 65 – instead of 60 – would retain nearly

100

consultants over the next five years



The workforce crisis in clinical oncology deepens: Action is urgently needed to improve working conditions for consultants and cancer services for patients.

Cancer therapies in the UK continue to improve at an exciting pace, with advances in radiotherapy and novel systemic treatments extending life expectancy and improving quality of life. Clinical oncologists are central to delivering these advances and to providing the drive and leadership to realise their potential. It is therefore very concerning that the RCR 2018 census data provide evidence of a severe and growing shortage of consultant clinical oncologists.

This highlights the urgent need for more clinical oncology training places across the UK, along with improved working practices for consultants, to retain and make best use of their valuable skills. If workforce shortages are not addressed, there is a real risk that the treatment of people with cancer will be adversely affected.

Demand for cancer services has increased significantly, due to the increased numbers of cancer patients and the increased complexity of cancer treatments. Workforce growth has not kept pace. The 2018 workforce census shows that the current shortfall of 184 full-time consultant clinical oncologists (18% shortfall) is forecast to rise to a shortfall of 272 full-time consultant clinical oncologists (22% shortfall) by 2023.

Cancer centres are struggling to recruit. They reported that there are not enough suitable candidates, or even

temporary locums, to fill consultant vacancies. This has led to a doubling of vacant posts over the past five years. Over half of the 70 vacancies reported in the 2018 census have remained unfilled for a year or more and one in six cancer centres now have fewer consultant clinical oncologists working for them than five years ago.

Many consultant clinical oncologists are now working extended hours to help cover staff shortages; almost one in four are contracted to work over 48 hours per week. However, increased workload over a prolonged period leads to stress and burnout, which in turn can lead to adverse patient outcomes. The increased number of consultants leaving the profession over the past five years and early retirement, resulting in the loss of valuable expertise may be a reflection of the increased workload and working hours of consultant clinical oncologists.

NHS employing organisations need to create and implement robust retention strategies to prevent further avoidable loss of vital staff.

The RCR census data paint an alarming picture of cancer services in the UK. It is clear that training bodies need to undertake strategic national workforce planning, based on the forecast future demand for cancer services, making sure that sufficient staff are in place to deliver best practice for the benefit of patients. If current and forecast future shortages of consultant clinical oncologists are not addressed, UK cancer strategies will not be realised and there is a real danger that people with cancer will not receive the quality treatment they expect and deserve.

Read the full report of the findings of the 2018 clinical oncology census online at www.rcr.ac.uk/oncology-census