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A record number of GP practices are handing back their contract to the NHS, feeling unable to fulfil their NHS requirements, it has been warned.

Ahead of a Scottish Conservative debate on GP recruitment tomorrow, doctors will say there were 52 2c practices last year, the term given to those who return their contract to the local health board.

That's the highest figure on record, the Royal College of General Practitioners said, affecting 160,000 patients.

The projected shortfall of GPs has also risen.

By 2021, experts now think Scotland will have 856 fewer GPs than necessary, compared to a previous forecast of 828.

The debate, led by Scottish Conservative MSP Jamie Greene, will take place in Holyrood tomorrow.

The party has repeatedly called for a greater slice of the health budget to be invested in general practice, to ward off a recruitment crisis and take the strain off other parts of the NHS.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“This a depressing indication of just how serious Scotland's GP crisis has become.

“These are not decisions a GP practice would take lightly, and tens of thousands of patients will have been hit as a result.

“The SNP has had more than a decade to ensure Scotland has a well-resourced, well-equipped GP set-up.

“Instead, dozens of practices are returning their contracts because they can't meet their obligations.

“This warning also talks of yet another worsening in the projected shortfall of GPs.

“If the SNP doesn’t take some serious action soon, the situation for patients of all kinds in a few years’ time will be utterly bleak.”