

Longer GP appointments in deprived areas to close inequality gap

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Giving patients in deprived areas longer GP appointments could help reduce health inequalities, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

The idea will be among several looked at by a new Health Advisory Board assembled by the party.

The expert panel was unveiled today in Edinburgh by leader Ruth Davidson and shadow health secretary Miles Briggs.

Earlier this year, following calls from the Scottish Conservatives, ministers agreed an additional £250 million in funding for general practice.

Decisions on how that will be spent are yet to be taken, but one suggestion the panel will look at is the possibility of providing longer appointments for patients in less wealthy areas.

The health inequality gap in Scotland is well-documented, with those in more deprived parts significantly more likely to suffer from a range of illnesses, with a far lower life expectancy.

Studies have shown the more time a patient spends with a GP, the less their health will deteriorate, and the fewer appointments they will need in future.

The proposal is supported by the Royal College of GPs, who said: *“RCGP believes that longer appointments are invaluable for improving the quality of care all patients can receive ... Those in areas of health inequality, be they in urban or in rural areas, need their GP more often than most and to provide an adequate service the funding must be put in place.”*

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“Extra money for general practice is something the Scottish Conservatives have demanded for some time.

“Now it’s been agreed, we need to talk about how that is going to be spent.

“We believe one area worth looking at is longer appointments for patients in poorer areas who we know are more likely to suffer from a range of illnesses.

“Even extending the time they spend with a doctor from 10 minutes to 15 minutes could make a huge difference for their health and wellbeing.

“Of course, GPs are already under immense pressure, and this is something that would require good planning and additional funding.

“But this is the sort of discussion we have to have, and this Health Advisory Board will do exactly that.”

The Health Advisory Board was launched by the Scottish Conservatives in Edinburgh today.

Studies have shown longer appointments for patients in deprived areas could reduce health inequalities:

<http://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/news/commissioning/commissioning-topics/long-term-conditions/longer-gp-appointments-highly-cost-effective-finds-major-study/20032134.article>

On the prospect of longer appointments, the Royal College of GPs is supportive:

“RCGP believes that longer appointments are invaluable for improving the quality of care all patients can receive. Such benefit could be realised across a host of patient circumstances, from those people who have a mental health component to their consultation to those who present with a relatively minor concern as a means to opening up a more substantial issue with their GP.

“If we are to achieve that time for GPs to spend with patients then we need to see substantial increases in funding for general practice to 11% of the NHS Scotland budget, reversing the decade worth of cuts to the percentage share the service has received and permitting a radical increase in GP numbers such as that promised in England.

“Those in areas of health inequality, be they in urban or in rural areas, need their GP more often than most and to provide an adequate service the funding must be put in place.”

Below are the members taking part on the new Health Advisory Board:

Dr Chris Kidson – Paediatric Consultant, Royal Hospital for Children, Glasgow

Dr Neil Dewhurst – Former President of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

Andrew Robertson – Former Chair of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde

Erin McIlveen – General Surgery Specialty Trainee, West of Scotland

Johnathan Laird MRPharmS (IPresc) – Director of PharmacyinPractice.scot and member of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society Scottish Pharmacy Board

Dr Katharine Morrison – General Medical Practitioner, Ayrshire

Dr Belinda Hacking – Division of Clinical Psychology Scotland, British Psychological Society

Norman Provan – Associate Director, Royal College of Nursing Scotland
Emma Currer – National Officer for Scotland, Royal College of Midwives