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Around one in eight out of hours shifts in GP surgeries are left unfilled, a study has suggested.

Analysis of shifts in doctor surgeries at nights and weekends showed 12.8 per cent were vacant across the country.

In some health boards, more than a quarter of shifts went unfilled.

The statistics were obtained by the Scottish Conservatives, who asked for a snapshot of GP out of hours staff cover during a week in May in a bid to uncover the extent of the problem.

The responses indicate widespread staffing difficulties in GP surgeries north of the border.

Already this year it's been reported that a quarter of trainee posts in local practices are empty, while experts have warned there will be a shortfall of more than 800 doctors within a few years.

The SNP's disastrous workforce planning over recent years – despite being repeatedly warned about the challenges brought by an ageing population – has been blamed for the crisis.

The Scottish Conservatives have called for a larger proportion of the health budget to be invested in primary care in an attempt to improve service, take the strain off GPs, and make things easier for other parts of the NHS further down the line.

Shadow health secretary Miles Briggs warned that rate of unfilled shifts would be even more problematic as the winter months approach.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“This is yet another indication of the GP crisis which is gripping Scotland.

“It's incredible to think around one in eight GP out of hours shifts can't be filled purely because the SNP hasn't bothered to plan for the future properly.

“The NHS is on its knees in a number of areas, but that is particularly apparent in local GP practices.

“It means patients can’t get the help they need, and the hardworking doctors left behind are becoming increasingly over-stretched.

“And with the winter months well on their way, this crisis could have even more severe consequences.

“The SNP government has let it get to this stage, and now has to explain to patients north of the border what it is going to do to address it.”

The Scottish Conservatives asked all health boards for the percentage of unfilled out of hours shifts in GP practices for the week commencing May 22, 2017. The responses can be accessed here:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/00HResponses.zip>

Below is the proportion of unfilled out of hours GP shifts by health board for that week:

NHS Ayrshire and Arran – 16.4 per cent
NHS Borders – 4.5 per cent
NHS Dumfries and Galloway – 5.5 per cent
NHS Fife – n/a
NHS Forth Valley – 26 per cent
NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde – 4 per cent
NHS Grampian – 7 per cent
NHS Highland – n/a
NHS Lanarkshire – 11.6 per cent
NHS Lothian – 7 per cent
NHS Orkney – 0
NHS Shetland – 0
NHS Tayside – 4.8 per cent
NHS Western Isles – 0

Scotland – 12.8 per cent