

[Up to 3000 doctors have left Scotland in the last decade](#)

- [Home](#)
- [All News](#)
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The SNP must step up efforts to boost recruitment and retention of Scottish trained doctors as new figures today reveal the scale of the “brain drain” of medics over the last decade.

As many as 3,000 are estimated to have left the country to work abroad since 2008, the figures show.

The new data is revealed as the Scottish Conservatives launch a major new campaign entitled “Save our Surgeries”.

GPs are particularly affected by doctor shortages – with the Royal College of GPs warning that Scotland will soon be short of 850 general practitioners.

The Scottish Conservatives will this week be writing to every GP clinic in Scotland, and is urging an increase in the share of NHS funding that goes direct to GP practices.

Today’s figures were obtained from the General Medical Council and show the number of doctors who have requested a Certificate of Current Professional Status – the document required by medics who choose to work abroad under a new employer.

Since 2008, 5,044 have done so. The two highest years were the two most recent completed years, 2015 and 2016, when 663 and 612 doctors requested a CCPS.

Of those that applied, 2,149 are connected to a ‘designated body’ – meaning they are likely to still be practicing in Scotland.

The remainder, some 2,895 Scottish trained doctors, are not – and are therefore almost certain to be working abroad.

The call for action to boost the flow of doctors in the NHS comes with BMA figures suggesting that as many as a third of GPs – some 1,500 doctors – are set to retire by 2020.

The Scottish Government has sought to boost GP recruitment but, last year, a major drive to find an extra 100 GPs resulted in only 37 coming on board.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“These figures show that as many as 3,000 Scottish trained doctors are currently working abroad – setting out starkly the brain drain we have seen in Scotland over the last decade.

“Of course every part of the UK has lost doctors to countries like Australia and New Zealand in recent years. But rather than point the finger elsewhere, the SNP must act on these figures and do more encourage doctors to come back – or not leave in the first place.

“A Scottish Conservative government would prioritise GP spending, so that 11% of all NHS spending went direct to the local practice, helping to boost working conditions, recruitment and retention.

“Scotland’s GP’s are at the forefront of our NHS – if we as a country can’t get General Practice right and working to deliver health services across Scotland then the rest of our NHS will continue to be destabilised.

“That’s why, this week, our Save our Surgeries campaign will shine a spotlight on the problems we face – and suggest a better way of doing things. The SNP needs to wake up and deliver.”