

Our ailing general practice: a neglect of human ecology

Last week's letter from three veteran GPs (*Without action, general practice faces extinction*, 28.9.21) represents the anguished view of almost all GPs who served in a previous era of greater trust, satisfaction and vocational spirit. As we older practitioners face our own accumulating vulnerabilities, we know that we will not now receive the kind of personal engagement and attention that we strove to provide for others: our long careers were anchored in personal continuity of care.

That personal continuity of care depended on *relationships*; but those relationships could only grow from roots in stable working communities small enough for people to get to know one another – and so develop bonds of trust, comfort and understanding. That is how we could best look after, and look out for, one another – patients and colleagues alike. It was this trusting culture of personal familiarity and responsibility that motivated and nourished the erstwhile better general practice: it had high morale, recruitment and satisfaction rates (among both practitioners and patients).

Such humanity-rich culture has been deracinated by three decades of serial 'modernising' reforms modelled on competitive manufacturing industries and policed bureaucratic compliance. The destruction of our colleagueial and community-based personal networks has left us with an alienated no-one-knows-anyone-but-just-do-as-you're-told behemoth. The unhappiness with this – among both practitioners and patients – is now rife and hazardous. This is a problem of unviable human ecology, and was gathering long before Covid.

Any remedy requires far more than the promised increase of funding or trainees.

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