The Otolaryngology consultant workforce in England: a survey update, and future repercussions

Jonathan Lee¹, Nieto H², Hall C³, and Ann-Louise McDermott⁴

¹South Warwickshire University NHS Foundation Trust
²Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham
³Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
⁴Birmingham Women’s and Children’s NHS Foundation Trust

October 20, 2023

Abstract

Introduction Effective medical staffing is pivotal for a successful healthcare system, demanding strategic planning to ensure a high-quality service. Although the UK’s doctor to population ratio has improved over time, it remains below global averages. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges, resulting in an unprecedented NHS waiting list with Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) surgeries ranking third highest in waiting times amongst all specialties. Methods This study utilized a national Jotform survey to gather data from ENTUK members, primarily focusing on consultant staffing within ENT departments across the UK. Additional information collected encompassed registration status, part-time roles, gender, vacancies, locum roles, associate specialists, registrars and other junior doctors, and advanced nurse practitioners. When survey responses were inadequate, direct communication was established with departmental consultants or secretaries, followed by Freedom of Information requests as necessary. All data were compiled using Microsoft Excel. Results Among the 65 responses to the ENTUK survey, 53 individual trusts were identified. These included 41 English acute trusts, with supplementary participation from Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Data from 749 consultants across 115 English acute trusts were collected in combination with a Freedom of Information request. Conclusion Despite an increased number of ENT consultants, the persistence of unfilled posts coincides with mounting waiting lists. The pandemic’s effects, including early retirements and part-time roles, emphasise the urgency of expanding training positions to counterbalance these shifts. Local and national interventions are essential to fortify and diversify the ENT workforce through a variety of strategies.

Hosted file