

The current climate between physician associates and doctors in training working within the national health service in England: A quantitative study

Mesharck G^{1*}, Borumand M¹, Clement O², Sam C³, Sapat K⁴, Lawrence E⁵, Sohal SK¹, Nteteka A¹.

Bedford Hospital¹ UK, University of Reading² UK, University of Warwick³ UK, Ealing Hospital⁴ UK, Bexley Medical Group⁵ UK.

Abstract

Background: Effective teamwork within the healthcare settings is globally recognised as an important tool for constructing a more efficient, and patient-centered healthcare delivery system. According to Oliver¹ doctors have created an increasingly hostile narrative towards PAs on social media and raised repeated concerns about their impact on patients' safety and training opportunities for doctors.

Aim: To identify the main cause(s) of the hostile climate between PAs, and doctors in training working within the NHS.

Method: A cross-sectional quantitative study, using a structured questionnaire.

Results: 98 respondents completed the questionnaire, of which 40 were qualified PAs, and 58 were doctors.

Conclusion: The study established that most of the respondents believe there is tension between PAs, and doctors in training. This can lead to negative impact on patient care, and loss of public trust in the NHS. Resolution on doctors' pay and promoting the positive impact of PAs on the workforce could help reduce the tension.

Introduction

The healthcare system worldwide continues to be faced with fewer doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals because of the growing global population^{2,3}. The UK government has adopted the Medical Associate Professions (MAPs) role as one of the strategies to deal with the current healthcare professional shortage within the NHS. According to HEE⁴, evidence shows that MAPs are safe, increase the breadth of the skill, capacity, and flexibility of teams, and positively contribute to patient experience.

- Recently, there have been an increasing number of statements published by the BMA England and the BMA Scotland about their position on the expansion of MAPs, especially PAs and AAs^{5,6,7}.
- Doctors have created an increasingly hostile narrative towards PAs on social media and raised repeated concerns about their impact on patients' safety and training opportunities for doctors¹.
- PAs themselves see and hear negative social media comments, which they find hostile and upsetting¹.
- Currently, no study has attempted to gather data from the PAs, and doctors in training working within the NHS on the possible cause(s) of the tension between these two professions.

Objectives

- To identify some of the causes for the hostile relationship between PAs, and doctors in training.
- To determine the negative effects of the hostile relationship between the two professions.
- To identify measures to address the current climate between PAs, and doctors in training.

Method

- A cross-sectional quantitative study, using a structured questionnaire.
- Questionnaire gathered through interviews with qualified PAs, and doctors in training. And open-access articles reporting on the tension between these professions.
- This was a pilot and microcosm study in a one-month period.
- Respondents for the survey comprised of qualified PAs, and doctors in training working within the NHS trust in both primary and secondary care in England.
- Questionnaire distributed electronically using a google document links and returned simultaneously.
- Findings were analysed quantitatively using descriptive statistics.

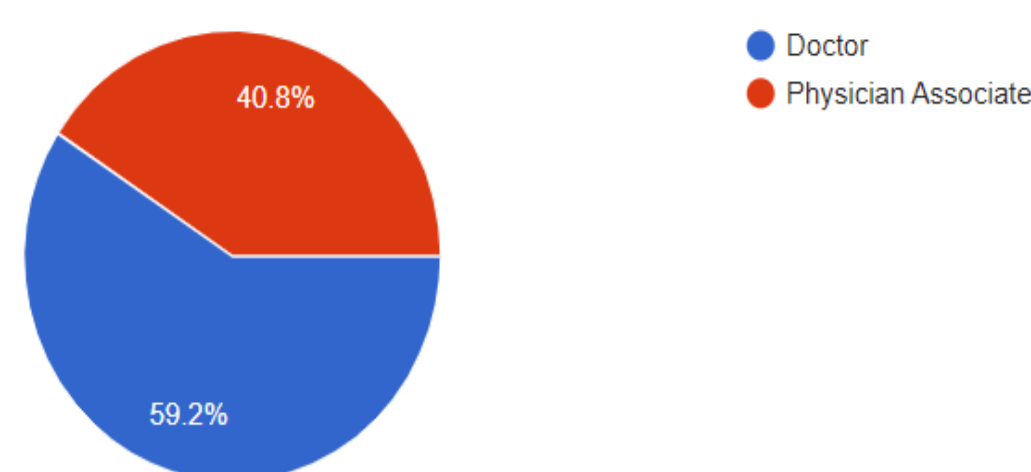
Results

A total of 98 respondents completed the questionnaire, of which 40 were qualified PAs, and 58 were doctors. The results are presented under the following themes:

1. Demography of the respondents

What is your current role?

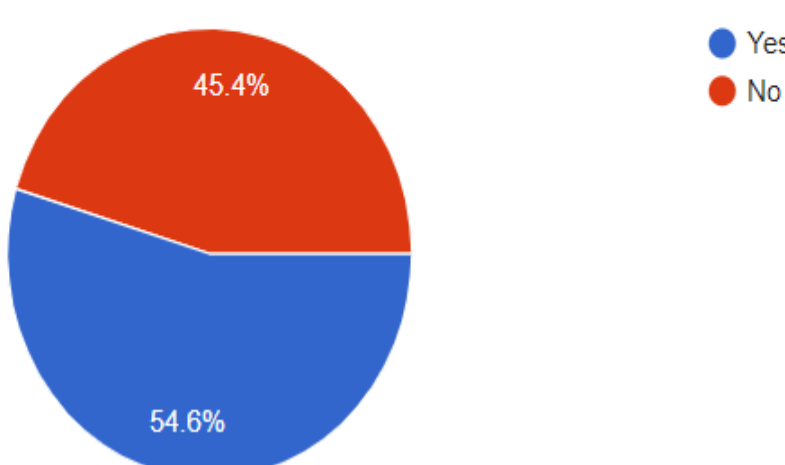
98 responses



2. General perception about the current poor working relationship between PAs and doctors and its negative impacts.

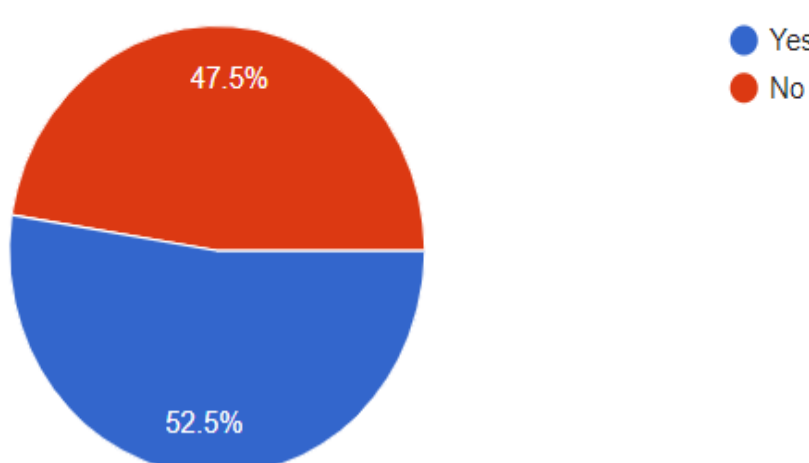
Do you feel in general there is currently poor working relationship between Physician Associates and doctors?

97 responses



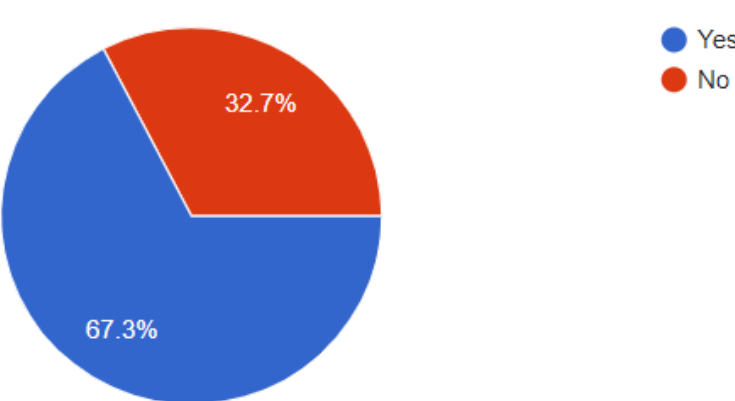
Do you feel the current conflict between Physician Associates and doctors is having a negative impact on you or your work?

99 responses



Do you think the current conflict between Physician Associates and doctors is causing loss of public trust in NHS?

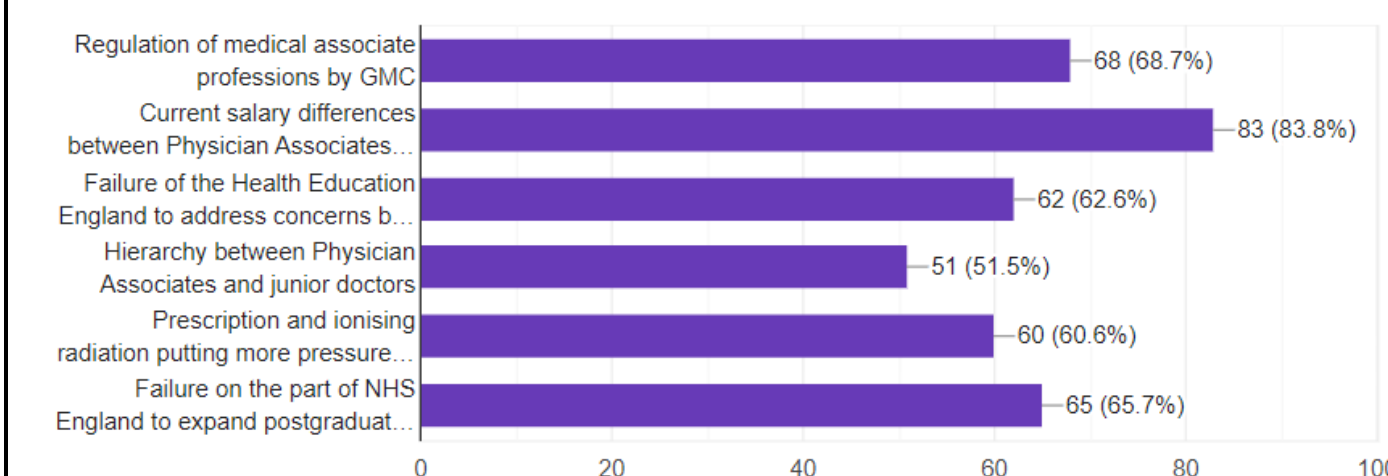
98 responses



3. Possible cause(s) of the conflict between PAs and doctors.

What do you think is the cause of current conflict between doctors and Physician Associates working in NHS? (can select more than one option)

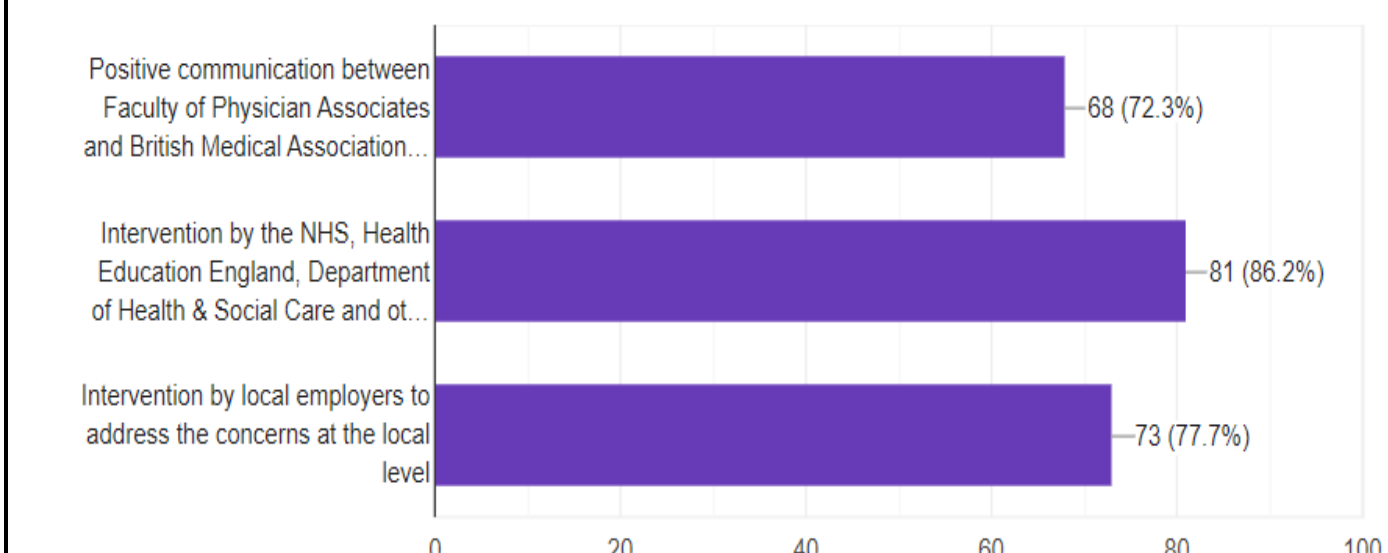
99 responses



4. Recommended steps to mitigate the current toxic relationship between PAs and doctors.

What do you think could help to promote conducive relationship between Physician Associates and doctors? (can select more than one option)

94 responses



Conclusion

- The study established that, majority of the respondents believe there is tension between PAs, and doctors in training.
- Salary difference, GMC overseeing the regulation of MAPs, and the lack of training opportunities for junior doctors were the possible causes.
- The current hostile climate between these two professionals could lead to negative impact on patient care, and loss of public trust in the NHS.
- Resolution on doctors' pay, promoting the positive impact of PAs on the workforce, more effort to tackle the perception that MAPs would "replace doctors" by key stakeholders could help calm down frayed nerves.

Recommendations

- Extended nationwide investigation on the causes, impact and resolution hostile climate between PAs, and doctors in training using a mixed-method approach at a large scale with support from major stakeholders.
- Further research into the dynamics between doctors, and MAPs to enhance the understanding of their individual roles within the NHS.
- Establishment of policy frameworks and standards to promote integrated care models and enhance seamless collaboration among PAs, and doctors in the clinical settings.

Acknowledgement

- I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my co-authors of the original paper.
- Thank you to Dr Clement Otor for his assistance in designing this poster
- All co-authors have seen and agree with the content of this research and there is no financial interest to report.

Reference

- 1.Oliver D. The fractious debate over physician associates in the NHS.
- 2.Halter M et al. Patients' experiences of consultations with physician associates in primary care in England.
- 3.Mesharck G. The Role of Physician Associate in Primary Care in England.
- 4.Health Education England. Open letter to the BMA regarding regulation and supervision. 2023.
- 5.BMA. Medical associate Professions briefing. 2023.
- 6.BMA Scotland. Physician associates/Anaesthesia associates (PAs/AAs).
- 7.Oliver D. Why shouldn't doctors defend our distinct professional identity?