



# Retaining doctors in organisations in socio-economically deprived areas in England

## 1. What was the question?

Working as a doctor in the NHS is an important but difficult job. Sometimes doctors leave the workforce because of the challenges of the job. Lots of research has looked at what makes doctors leave. We wanted to know what helped doctors to stay in their job.



## 2. What did we do?

We interviewed 100 doctors working in the NHS at different stages of their careers. Ninety worked in areas that struggled to keep doctors. These are places that have lots of challenges like poor health and poverty. Ten worked in an area that many doctors want to work in. We asked them questions about their careers. We wanted to know why they picked their job. We also wanted to know what made them want to stay. We listened to their answers and thought about what these answers had in common.



## 3. What did we find?

Doctors said they want to work in places where they feel valued. This means more than having a good wage. Doctors feel valued when their employer supports them at work. They feel supported when they can talk to their managers about difficult situations. They also feel supported when their managers make time for their training. Feeling valued could also mean practical things that made their lives easier. Doctors wanted to have somewhere to park their car at work. They also thought it was important to have somewhere to buy hot food on a night shift. Doctors work in lots of different places during their training. This means that they see which places have good facilities and value doctors most and which do not. This makes doctors want to work in some places but not others.

Some doctors had worked for a long time in places that were not popular. These places often do not have many benefits for their staff. Doctors that stayed in these places liked the control they had over their jobs. They felt they could spend more time on things they enjoyed about work. In a popular place they might not be able to do this. Doctors want to make a difference to their patients. They felt they could be better at this in smaller, less popular places. They felt it was harder to make a difference in big places.



## 4. What does this mean?

We want to make sure our health service has enough doctors. This means paying attention to the things that make doctors want to leave their jobs. It also means paying attention to what makes them want to stay working in a place. Making sure doctors are happy with their jobs means less doctors will leave. Places that struggle to keep hold of doctors face lots of challenges. Doctors could still see good reasons to work there. The health service needs to pay more attention to these good reasons. This will help more doctors to stay.

This is a summary of: Brewster L, Mumford C, Patel T, et al. Retaining doctors in organisations in socioeconomically deprived areas in England: a qualitative study.

BMJ Open; 15. DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2025-100694.

[mapping.doctors@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:mapping.doctors@lancaster.ac.uk)

[www.lancaster.ac.uk/mappingdoctors](http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/mappingdoctors)

This study is funded by the NIHR (HSDR NIHR 134540). The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.