



Where do they come from and where do they go: understanding the relationship between deprivation and the geographical journeys of trainee doctors in England.

1. What was the question?

People in the UK do not have equal access to healthcare. This is partly because the UK does not have enough doctors. To fix this problem, the NHS has tried increasing the number of students going to medical school. They have also tried to make sure these students are from different backgrounds. We want to know more about where in the country medical students come from and how their backgrounds affect the choices they make about their training. This will help us find solutions to this problem of unequal access to healthcare.



3. What did we find?

We found that there are fewer students from deprived areas at medical school. This particularly the case in older, more established medical schools. We also found that most medical schools recruit heavily from the nearby area. Students are willing to travel further, however, to attend medical schools seen as more prestigious. All medical schools recruit more female than male students. There are also a higher proportion of non-white students in medical school than in the population on average.

When students finish medical school, they often stay in the same region to begin their in-work training. Women and non-white students are two groups of students that move further away. More research is needed to find out why this is the case. Students who finish medical school in London are more likely to move than students in other places. This is because London is a popular place for doctors to work. There are also more medical students than training places in London.

2. What did we do?

Data is available about everyone who has started a medical degree in England since 2002. This data contains information about the areas these people came from, the medical school they went to, and the part of the country they worked in afterwards. We used this data to find patterns in people's journeys through medical education and in-work training

4. What does this mean?

Our analysis shows that a person's gender, ethnicity, and where they are from can affect their future medical career. Female doctors, doctors from different ethnic backgrounds, and doctors from deprived areas do not have the same medical career opportunities as others.

The number of medical students and doctors from deprived areas remains low. Medical schools may need to make more of an effort to actively recruit and support students from these areas. This would help to fix the problem of unequal access to healthcare across the UK.

This is a summary of: Rowlingson B., Diggle P., Lambert M., and Brewster, L. (2026) Where do they come from and where do they go: understanding the relationship between deprivation and the geographical journeys of trainee doctors in England. PLoS One; submitted.

mapping.doctors@lancaster.ac.uk
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.

