

NHS spending on locums breaks the £300m mark

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Spending on temporary staff to plug gaps in Scotland's NHS broke the £300 million mark for the first time last year, new research has shown.

Health boards were forced to spend more than £310 million in 2016/17 on locum doctors and nurses, an increase from £250 million the previous year.

And compared to 2014/15, the increase is more than £100 million.

The figures – obtained by the Scottish Conservatives through Freedom of Information – come as Scotland is in the grip of a GP crisis.

Earlier this week, a GP survey found that one in four practices has a doctor vacancy, while the overall number of GPs has reduced in recent years.

This issue was raised by Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson at First Minister's Questions today, who also pointed out that in eight of the last 10 years, the share of GP funding has fallen north of the border.

She demanded Nicola Sturgeon explain why, after more than a decade in sole charge of the health brief, her SNP government has failed to act.

However, instead of addressing the problems in locum spending and general practice, the First Minister pointed to the performance of health systems in other parts of the UK.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"The number of GPs has plummeted in the face of increasing patient demand, and one in four surgeries is now short of a doctor.

"This is happening while the NHS at large in Scotland is being propped up by expensive private agencies to fill the gaps, because of poor workforce planning.

"This has occurred on the SNP's watch – it is a mess of the nationalist government's making.

"It's the same old story from the First Minister – she wants people to ignore a record amassed over a decade, and instead blindly believe her promises for the future.

"But right across Scotland people are struggling to get an appointment with their GP, and family doctors are feeling the strain.

“The SNP government needs to explain why it’s allowed this to happen.”