



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

Mr Ian Potter  
St Pancras Coroner's Court  
Camley Street  
London  
N1C 4PP

24 May 2024

Dear Mr Potter,

Thank you for your Regulation 28 report to prevent future deaths dated 2 April about the death of Mr Alan Andrew Soane. I am replying as Minister with responsibility for major diseases, including cancer.

Firstly, I would like to say how saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Mr Soane's death and I offer my sincere condolences to his family and loved ones. The circumstances your report describes are concerning and I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

The report raises concerns over the NHS Trust's inability to provide for the presence of a Consultant Histopathologist at Hepato-pancreato-biliary multi-disciplinary team meetings, and over the number of vacant Consultant Histopathologist roles nationally.

In preparing this response, Departmental officials have made enquiries with NHS England (NHSE). I have been informed that NHSE has been granted an extension to 18 June to send a response to you. As an Executive Agency of the Department of Health and Social Care, NHSE's response should further address the concern you raised.

I would like to reassure you that the training and recruiting of medical professionals is a very important matter for the government. I share your concern, and I would like to explain what the government is doing to address this.

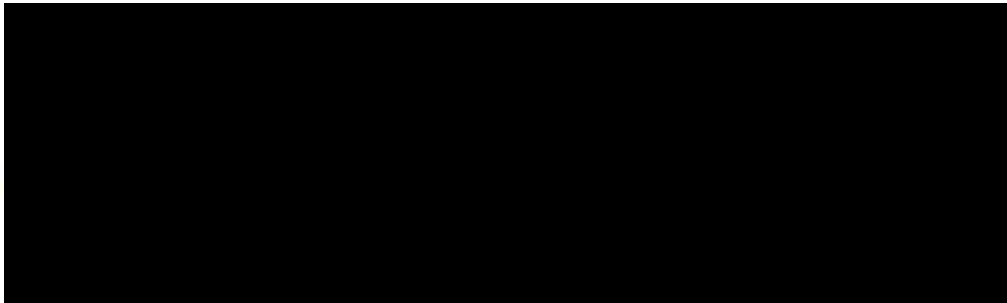
As of January 2024, there are 1,276 full-time equivalent (FTE) Consultant doctors working in the specialty of histopathology within NHS trusts and other core organisations in England. This is 16 (1.2%) more than in January 2023, 70 (5.8%) more than in January 2019 and 188 (17.3%) more than in January 2010. In addition, GMC data shows that in 2023 there were 506 doctors in histopathology specialty training in England, which is 38 (8.1%) more than in 2022 and 123 (32.1%) more than in 2019.

The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan (LTWP), published by NHS England in June 2023, sets out the steps the NHS and its partners need to take to deliver an NHS workforce that meets the changing needs of the population over the next 15 years. The plan outlines the action needed to ensure we train and retain more staff, and reform medical education and training to put the NHS workforce on a sustainable footing for the future.

The LTWP sets out the aim to double the number of medical school places in England to 15,000 places a year by 2031/32, and to work towards this expansion by increasing places by a third, to 10,000 a year, by 2028/29. We have brought forward the trajectory of this planned expansion for the last 2 years, having allocated 205 and 350 additional places for the 2024/25 academic years respectively. There are now an additional 1,500 medical school places per year for domestic students in England – a 25% increase, taking the total number of medical school places in England to 7,500 each year. These expansions will increase the pool from which future histopathologists and other specialists can be drawn.

The department will continue to work with NHS England and other system partners to deliver the ambitions set out in the LTWP to ensure improvements for patient safety and outcomes.

I hope this response is helpful. Thank you for bringing this concern to my attention.



**THE RT HON ANDREW STEPHENSON CBE MP  
MINISTER OF STATE**