General practitioners, genetics and the new contract framework: any future?

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Introduction
Primary care teams increasingly will be involved in providing care that incorporates genetics, carrying out more screening, assessing risk and filtering referrals, as is occurring with familial cancers. How genetic technologies can be integrated effectively into primary care is not clear. Your Contract, Your Future proposes radical changes to the organisation of primary care; genetic services possibly could be contained within this framework, with the support of general practitioners. This project aims to ascertain the views of general practitioners on whether or how such services should be delivered, and to assess their needs in doing so, in order to inform education and service development.

Method
Principals (n=1931) and Non-Principals (n=222) across Wales were sent a 2½ page questionnaire with reminders sent at approximately 3 week intervals. Participants were asked about the place of genetics within the new framework, their willingness and confidence to engage in such services, and their views on the cancer genetics service model. Quantitative data are being analysed using SPSS, and qualitative data with NVivo.

Results
Preliminary findings are presented here. The response rate is 44.1% after 3 reminders (Principals) and 35.6% after one reminder (Non-Principals). Options are divided across both groups as to the importance of the new framework for effective integration of genetics; approximately one third of respondents would place it as an enhanced service, and one quarter feel it should not be offered at all. Principals appear less willing to become involved in offering genetics. More Non-Principals than Principals feel confident about dealing with genetics, although fewer know about the cancer genetics service. Both groups rated referral guidelines as being of most help.

Conclusions
General Practitioners appear ambivalent about the place of genetics in primary care. Further analysis is needed to clarify any differences in opinions between the two groups.