

Excellence in Patient Care Awards 2026: why your work deserves to be recognised and how to apply

Across the UK and beyond, RCP members and their teams are quietly delivering extraordinary improvements in patient care. From sustainability initiatives and service redesign, to tackling health inequalities, digital innovation and collaborative working across systems. This work is happening every day, transforming healthcare and the lives of patients, often without the recognition they deserve.

The Excellence in Patient Care Awards (EPCA) exist to shine a light on these efforts. As applications for the 2026 awards close on 16 February, now is the moment to consider whether your project, or one you've been involved in, could be recognised and shared more widely.

If awards feel intimidating, you are not alone. Many previous applicants tell us they hesitated before applying. In reality, EPCA celebrates projects at all stages of development. If your work has made a difference to patients, staff or systems, it's worth telling the story.

In 2025, sustainability award winners, Dr Vincent Simpson and Dr Deepthi Lavu told Commentary: 'We thought there was no reason why we should have applied for this RCP award. We often have imposter syndrome, and we don't realise how big the syndrome is until someone else points out how much you have achieved. Throw yourself out there and it might be much bigger than what you think it is.'

What are the Excellence in Patient Care Awards?

Run by the RCP, the EPCA recognise outstanding contributions to patient care made by physicians and their teams across the UK. The awards span a wide range of categories, reflecting the diversity of modern healthcare, including patient safety, sustainability, collaboration, digital innovation and improving care for underserved populations.

At a time of significant change across the healthcare landscape, with new policy priorities, system shifts and long-term planning underway, the EPCAs offer a reminder that meaningful improvement is already happening in across the UK and globally. These awards are about celebrating these projects, learning from them,

and giving teams the recognition they deserve.

Winning or being shortlisted can also help amplify your work: through national visibility, peer learning and opportunities to inspire others facing similar challenges.

If applying for an award feels daunting, it's worth knowing that the EPCA application is short and straightforward. The form has just a few short sections:

- A 50-word project summary.
- 400–500 words on your approach, actions and outcomes.
- 100 words on scale and spread.

This means it is only around 600–650 words in total. Shortlisted applicants will then be invited to present their project to the judges, with short online presentations taking place 27 April – 8 May 2026.

What the judges are really looking for

All EPCA applications are assessed against five clear criteria. You don't need to structure your application rigidly around them, but keeping them in mind will help you focus on what matters most.

Innovation

Innovation doesn't have to mean something entirely new and high-tech. Judges are looking for evidence that your project goes beyond simply repeating existing practice, whether that's a new approach, a creative adaptation, or an improvement on what was there before. Clear explanations of what changed and why it mattered are often more important than technical detail.

Collaboration

Strong applications demonstrate collaboration beyond a single individual or team. This might include multidisciplinary working, involvement of allied health professionals, or partnerships with other organisations, charities or community groups. Meaningful involvement of patients, carers or families, particularly where they have shaped the project, is especially valued. Relevance to the award category

Judges want to understand why your project belongs in the category you've chosen. Make this explicit. The strongest applications show clear alignment with the category theme and demonstrate how the project responds to local or national priorities, guidance or challenges facing the healthcare system.

Reach and impact

Impact is at the heart of EPCA. This includes the difference your project has made for patients, staff, services or systems. Impact may be local or wider reaching, and can include improvements to experience, outcomes, efficiency or equity.

Scalability

You don't need to have scaled your project already, but you should show that it could be replicated or adapted elsewhere. Judges look for evidence that the idea is transferable, whether across departments, organisations or systems, and that potential barriers have been considered.

Turning your project into a strong application

If the application form feels daunting, breaking it down into practical steps can help.

Be clear about the problem you were addressing

Start by setting the context. What wasn't working well, and why did it matter? This helps judges understand the need for innovation and relevance from the outset. Describe what you actually did, and what was different. Explain how your approach improved on existing practice. This is where innovation often comes through, even in small but significant changes.

Show collaboration in action

Rather than listing who was involved, describe how people worked together. If patients, carers or partners helped shape the project, explain how this influenced the work and its outcomes.

Use evidence to demonstrate impact

This doesn't have to be complex. Simple data, patient or staff feedback, and clear before and after examples can all demonstrate reach and impact effectively.

Think ahead about sustainability and spread

Judges value projects that are designed to last. Briefly outlining plans for sustainability, or how the project could be replicated elsewhere, strengthens your application.

Look at previous examples

Case studies from past EPCA 2025 winners and finalists are available and can be reassuring if this is your first time applying. They show the wide range of projects that have been recognised.

Across the UK, physicians and their teams are improving patient care in creative, committed and often challenging circumstances. Whether your project focuses on sustainability, safety, digital innovation, collaboration or reducing inequalities, EPCA is an opportunity to give that work the visibility it deserves.

EPCA applications close on 16 February. If you are doing something that has made a difference even on a small scale, we want to hear from you. By sharing your work, you're not only gaining recognition for your team, but helping to inspire and inform others across the profession.

This feature was produced for the February 2025 edition of *Commentary magazine*. You can read a [web-based version](#), which includes images.