

Statement from the physician community on the BMA ballot for industrial action

With just over a week until the BMA ballot for industrial action closes, we as leaders of the physician community want to reiterate to our trainee colleagues that whatever choice you make – we support you. Our message is the same to consultants who will receive a consultative ballot later this month.

We fully respect the right of trade union members to go on strike. The decision to pursue industrial action is never easy and is likely to weigh particularly heavily on healthcare professionals. We want all our members to know that we will support whatever decision you make. While it is not within our remit to comment on pay negotiations, we will always speak up on behalf of doctors and our health and social care colleagues.

We know that many NHS doctors feel demoralised. They are working incredibly hard to manage the fallout from COVID-19 and to tackle the backlog. As a result of the intense pressure that those working in the health and care system are currently experiencing, some doctors are choosing to leave the profession and there is a real risk that we will lose more.

The [Urgent and Emergency Recovery \(UEC\) plan](#) published last week is yet another reminder that no matter how many strategies are published, all roads lead to workforce. We cannot recover the health service, deliver care sustainably or implement any new ways of working without enough staff.

Training more doctors is a crucial part of creating a more sustainable health service – but it will take time, and will be for nothing if we don't take steps to also ensure that bright and ambitious students who begin their path to becoming an NHS doctor want to remain in the medical profession for the long-term. That is why solutions on retention for the here and now are vital. As a medical community we have long campaigned for an [expansion of medical school and training places to build on the 2018 expansion of 1,500 places](#), set out [recommendations for short-to-medium term workforce solutions](#), and [pressed the government to publish a long-term workforce plan](#) with the numbers of staff needed to meet demand.

We welcomed government's commitment last year to a workforce plan with independently verified forecasts for the number of doctors, nurses, and other professionals needed in 5, 10, and 15 years' time as we'd been calling for. We will keep making the case for funding to underpin that strategy and for it to include a range of solutions on recruitment and retention.

Workforce is the biggest barrier to ensuring waiting times and lists fall and to people getting the timely, quality care they need. We are clearly not attracting and retaining enough healthcare professionals or taking enough care of the ones we have. It is vital that staff feel supported and valued, and we know pay and conditions are central to that.

The fact that doctors are even considering industrial action is a strong sign that the government must do more to invest in the NHS workforce now and for the long-term. [As we have said](#), doctors couldn't be expressing their concerns about the NHS workforce any more strongly. We want all our members to know that we support you and we hear you. We hope that the government is listening and that a solution is reached swiftly.

Signatories

Royal College of Physicians

Association for Palliative Medicine of Great Britain and Ireland

Association of Cancer Physicians

British Association for Sexual Health and HIV

British Cardiovascular Society

British Geriatrics Society

British HIV Association

British Society for Allergy & Clinical Immunology

British Society for Clinical Neurophysiology

British Society for Haematology

British Society of Gastroenterology

British Society for Rheumatology

British Thoracic Society

Faculty of Occupational Medicine

Faculty of Physician Associates

Faculty of Public Health

Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine UK

MacDonald Obstetric Medicine Society

Society for Acute Medicine