

Press Release

Thursday, 19 November
2015



Massive strike vote by doctors caused by Hunt's incompetence

The junior doctors' massive vote in favour of industrial action – 98% of 76% balloted – is the biggest signal yet of the fight against this government's sheer arrogance in trying to bring the NHS to its knees and is matched only by Health Secretary Hunt's global incompetence in handling both the "negotiations" and the true agenda. Which is to break the terms, conditions, morale and spirit of all NHS staff to make it easier to break apart and sell off the bits that can make a profit to private companies. The junior doctors' stand is the front line of the battle to save the whole NHS, which becomes less whole and more fragmented with every service cut, private contract and torn-up wage agreement.

Professor Sue Richards, Keep Our NHS Public Co-Chair, said:

"In a ballot with a turnout of almost 80%, the junior doctors have virtually all voted to come out on strike. This is a ballot about terms and conditions but there is no doubt that it is fuelled by what junior doctors see happening all around them in the NHS – it is being brought to its knees by this government – through wasteful privatisation and the biggest squeeze on funding since the 1990s when they were last in power. The government says the NHS is safe in their hands, but the everyday reality tells the junior doctors different.

"Jeremy Hunt dresses up as the patient's friend, but he is proposing to remove the fines on the employers if they pressure doctors into working more than the agreed average 48 hours a week over three months, leaving the regulation of vital patient safety issue to an inadequately funded toothless national body. At the same time, the government is forcing hospitals not to use expensive agencies to supply locums, so what else are hospitals likely to do than force up the amount of overtime once they can get away with it?

"It is 40 years since junior doctors last went on strike, also on safety issues. Jeremy Hunt's incompetence has brought us to this show-down. Fortunately for all of us, the junior doctors are being responsible. The first strike day will be staffed as though it were Christmas day, and they will always be on hand in case of emergency. But it will mean extra days of pain for those waiting for elective surgery. The question is – who do you trust to look after your interests – those who dedicate their lives to looking after you, or the people who seem to have dedicated their lives to destroying the NHS?"

Dr Jacky Davis is a founder member of Keep Our NHS Public and is a hospital consultant:

"Junior doctors don't want to go on strike but they have been left with no choice. Junior doctors are

a vital mainstay of hospital medicine, and have worked long and hard to get to this point in their careers. Instead of recognising this Hunt has deliberately misled the public, negotiated in bad faith (including via the media) and abused statistics in his dealing with them. They have been driven to this situation by his actions, he is to blame.

The alternative is to negotiate with a gun to their heads because Hunt has threatened to impose the contract if they can't come to an agreement. The contract reduces the number of hours that are recognised as unsocial and ends pay progression. If the juniors have to accept this so will all other NHS workers.

“Hunt has abused statistics about the 'weekend effect' and he has implied that juniors don't work out of hours (see #IminworkJeremy campaign).

“All health professionals and the majority of patients should be behind the junior doctors in their action and I am sure the vast majority will be. Hunt needs to show good faith and accept their offer of negotiation via ACAS.

“Keep Our NHS Public is firmly behind junior doctors, we know this is everybody's fight. Join it, please. Join us now.”

[Ends]

Editors' Notes

Keep Our NHS Public was formed in 2005 and has a broad-based, public membership. There are 46 local groups, plus a national association. It has the explicit aim of countering marketisation [1,2] and privatisation of the NHS by campaigning for a publicly funded, publicly provided and publicly accountable NHS, available to all on the basis of clinical need. It is opposed to cuts in service which run counter to these principles. Further details: www.keepournhspublic.com

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[1] Davis, J., Lister, J. and Wrigley, D. (2015) *NHS For Sale*. London: Merlin Press.

Leys, C. and Player, S. (2011) *The Plot Against the NHS*. Pontypool: Merlin

Lister, J. (2008) *The NHS After 60: For Patients or Profits?* London: Middlesex University Press

Owen, D. (2014) *The Health of the Nation: The NHS in Peril*. York: Methuen, Chapter 4.

Player, S. (2013) 'Ready for market'. In *NHS SOS* ed by Davis, J. and Tallis, R. London: Oneworld, pp.38-61.

[2] The belief that 'competition is always best' does not work when applied to healthcare. A comprehensive and universal health service is best funded by public donation, which has been shown to be far more efficient overall than private-insurance healthcare models

[Davis, J., Lister, J. and Wrigley, D. (2015) *NHS For Sale*. London: Merlin Press. Chapters 2 and 8.

Lister, J. (2013) *Health Policy Reform: global health versus private profit*. Libri: Faringdon.

Pollock, A. and Price, D. (2013) In *NHS SOS*, ed by Davis, J. and Tallis, R. Oneworld: London, 174.]