

Press release on behalf of the SOS NHS coalition - for IMMEDIATE use

Huge national NHS Demonstration 'End the Crisis - Support the Strikes!' to take place in central London - tens of thousands expected to march

This Saturday 11th March, central London will play host to what is widely expected to be a huge national NHS march and demonstration [1]. Beginning opposite Warren Street tube station on Tottenham Court Road at 12pm and finishing up in Whitehall, this action has been called by the coalition *SOS NHS* [2] in response to the current crisis in the health service and ongoing industrial unrest. Speakers so far announced include BMA Council Chair Professor Philip Banfield and NEU General Secretary Kevin Courtney as well as NHS frontline workers, other union leads and a host of cross-party MPs/representatives.

The health service is currently experiencing the worst NHS crisis we have ever seen with around 500 people dying avoidably every week. On Saturday, campaigners and patients will stand side by side with NHS workers who are taking industrial action for the very future of the national health service. *SOS NHS* believe it will be an excellent vehicle for workers to rally, but also for the public and patients to be able to show their support with NHS staff, and with the service generally. The coalition are hopeful of putting further pressure on the government and encouraging them to act to fund the service to end the NHS crisis. The demonstration is also taking place a few days before both the Spring Budget and a mass walkout of public sector workers, adding further pressure on the government to announce investment in public services such as the NHS.

The *SOS NHS* coalition welcomes reports that talks between the Government and the unions are 'making good progress' and hopes that the Government engages with them in good faith, including for the forthcoming junior doctors strikes next week. Campaigners urge the government to agree to the reasonable demands of *all* NHS unions and award frontline staff the pay justice they deserve.

Dr Tony O'Sullivan, Co-Chair of Keep Our NHS Public (founder of the SOS NHS coalition) and retired Consultant Paediatrician says:

"There is a tragedy unfolding before our very eyes: 500 avoidable deaths every week on the NHS emergency pathway - the Government is 100% to blame. They must act now to invest properly in the NHS - after 13 years of running it down and preferentially funding private hospitals. In all my years as an NHS doctor I have never seen such a crisis of low morale amongst health staff - pay NHS staff properly now and repair this current crisis. We stand by all NHS staff making the difficult decision to take strike action: they deserve pay justice and they are fighting not just for themselves but for the entire future of the NHS."

Dr Andrew Meyerson, Junior Doctor working in A&E and one of those marching, says:

"We are now seeing up to 500 people die every single week from catastrophic delays in A&E departments due to government mismanagement of the NHS. That's equivalent to 5 Hillsborough disasters every single week, but the government shockingly does not consider this an emergency. A good shift nowadays for those working in A&E departments is one where someone doesn't die in our waiting rooms or show up dead on arrival in the back of a delayed ambulance. That this is happening in the 6th wealthiest country on the planet is an unacceptable failure of government. After years of warning the government of these

worsening problems and them doing nothing significant to fix them, after we doctors and nurses have put our lives on the line fighting for patients during the pandemic, and after seeing a real-terms pay cut of up to 30% since 2008, we're fed up. Striking is now the only way to stand up for and defend our NHS, our patients, and our professions, and that is why I'm striking and why I'm proud to be joining the SOSNHS coalition on 11 March. It's time to send a message to this government: We will no longer tolerate the destruction of our NHS and we are prepared to fight back. Enough is Enough."

Adam Kay, former junior doctor now bestselling author and comedian, says:

"It's no secret that the NHS is in a state of crisis. If we don't back the staff and support the strikes, we are resigning ourselves to the inevitable decline and destruction of the health service. If you ever stood outside your front door banging a pan, get yourself down to Whitehall this weekend and show the government how much we care about the people who care for us."

Holly Turner, specialist CAMHS Nurse and founder of grassroots organisation NHS Workers Say No! says:

"Cuts across the public sector are impacting on our ability to do our job: The knock on effect of a 300,000 staff deficit across social care is impacting every family I work with. There is a complete lack of focus on retention from any political party: 40,000 nurses left the NHS in the past year alone, that figure is a tragedy. We need to retain skilled and experienced staff, or who will train the nurses of the future? There is increased financial hardship across the workforce, people cannot afford to stay in the jobs they trained to do. I am married to a nurse, we both work overtime shifts extra month, sacrificing our rest days and family time to top up our income; we have nearly 40 years experience between us, and yet we still have to do this. Things have to change. I am marching on Saturday for my family, colleagues and ultimately for the survival of the NHS."

[ends]

For interview, further information and logistics ahead of and on the day, please contact Press and Media Officer for *Keep Our NHS Public*, Samantha Wathen on 0777 6047472 (including text/WhatsApp) or email press@keepournhspublic.com

Notes to editors

1. More demonstration information (including speakers) can be accessed here <https://keepournhspublic.com/sos-nhs-demonstration/>

Times (all times are approximate)

- 12:00pm - Pre-march speeches/rally starts
- 12:30pm – Tottenham Court Road/University Street junction – form up front
- 12:45pm – As above – Front banner press photo call
- 1:00pm – March leaves
- 2:00pm – Whitehall – March starts to arrive
- 2:30pm - Speeches start
- 4:00pm – Event closes

2. <https://sosnhs.org/> *SOS NHS* is the largest coalition yet formed in defence of the NHS comprised of over 50 campaign groups, trade unions, health and care staff, social movements and civil society organisations