

Moscow medics rally against hospital closures, job cuts

November 30 2014

Thousands of poorly paid Russian medics and opposition supporters marched in central Moscow and other Russian cities Sunday to protest against controversial health reforms that will lead to hospital closures and job losses.

The protesters, some dressed as the Grim Reaper and carrying scythes, held a rally after the march.

With long queues, rampant corruption and low survival rates, Russia's public health service is in desperate need of modernisation. But medics are up in arms at reforms that they say are about saving money, not improving care.

One protester carried a placard with a picture of President Vladimir Putin and the slogan: "When will your dirty tricks end?"

Other protesters pushed a wooden cart with a model coffin decorated with the slogan: "There weren't enough beds for me."

Around 4,000 people took part in the protest, Echo of Moscow radio station reported, while police put the numbers at around 1,500 people. Similar rallies were held at the same time in Russia's second largest city of Saint Petersburg and the Volga city of Nizhny Novgorod.

The Moscow rally, the second such protest by medics in the capital this month, was backed by two opposition parties in Russia's parliament, the

Communist Party and A Just Russia party.

"The plan of reforming Moscow's health system in 2014 and 2015 calls for the closure by the end of this year of 26 out of the city's 65 hospitals, including three maternity hospitals," the Communist Party said in a statement, calling its members to turn out

"The jobs of 7,000 medics will be cut" in Moscow, the Communists added.

The reforms were leaked to media in October, prompting a massive public reaction.

It is highly unusual for state employees to take part in protests against the city authorities and Putin.

The health ministry and Moscow's city government said that the reforms will improve [health](#) care by concentrating multiple specialists in more effective hospitals.

Sensing public discontent, Putin said this month he was aware of the "problem."

"I think it's true our colleagues did not think everything through here.... We've already talked to the Moscow authorities about this and it goes without saying we won't leave it at that," Putin said.

Currently, medics earn far less than their European counterparts—around 45,000 rubles (\$969) a month for a doctor.

Putin in 2012, on his return to the Kremlin for a third term, promised that doctors would have their pay doubled by 2018.

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