

# Doctors stage second strike in English hospitals (Update)

February 10 2016

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Thousands of junior doctors at English hospitals staged a second strike into Thursday against proposed new conditions and pay rates for working unsociable hours.

Junior doctors—all medics below consultant level—were providing only emergency care during the 24-hour strike, which runs from Wednesday until 8:00am (0800 GMT) Thursday.

Nearly 3,000 operations have been postponed, National Health Service (NHS) England said.

The main point of dispute between doctors and the government is over whether Saturday should be classed and paid as a normal working day.

Prime Minister David Cameron's centre-right government says the reforms are needed to help create a "seven days a week" NHS where the quality of care is as high at the weekends as on weekdays.

The BBC reported that doctors had rejected the government's "final take-it-or-leave-it" offer, raising the prospect of ministers imposing the new contract without agreement.

Junior doctors demonstrated outside hospitals around England during the day.

## Offer rejected

Abhishek Joshi, a heart doctor at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London, said the new contracts could stop hospital operators from being penalised if doctors work prolonged shifts, "at the end of which we'll be tired and therefore dangerous".

"There have been studies to show that tired doctors are even worse than drunk drivers," he told AFP.

"Would you want a drunk driver operating on you?... Saving your heart in the middle of the night? That's not what we want."

Outside Guy's Hospital in London, demonstrators held placards reading "Not fair, not safe" and "Tired doctors make mistakes".

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt insisted junior doctors were being offered "a fair deal".

Eight studies in five years had shown weekend mortality rates were higher and he had to "do something about that", he told the BBC.

The striking doctors contend that mortality rates are higher on weekends because those who are admitted tend to be emergency cases.

A first 24-hour strike was staged on January 12. A 48-hour strike planned for January 26 was called off.

There are more than 50,000 junior doctors in England, making up a third of the medical workforce.

They are qualified medical practitioners who work while studying for qualifications for more senior roles.

A senior government source said there was a "very reasonable offer on the table" and "hopefully they can accept it".

"At the moment there doesn't seem to be any sort of movement from the BMA side," the source said.

The government could simply impose the new contracts, and "we're not going to remove that from the table", the source added.

Doctor Johann Malawana, chairman of the British Medical Association's junior doctor committee, said the strike was "a resounding rejection of the government's threat to impose an unfair contract".

"Junior doctors already work around the clock, seven days a week and they do so under their existing contract," he said.

"If the government want more seven-day services then, quite simply, they need more doctors, nurses and diagnostic staff, and the extra investment needed to deliver it."

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