

UK: Tens of thousands of doctors kick off 3-day strike

March 13 2023, by Sylvia Hui



Junior doctors hold placards as they stand at a picket line outside St Thomas' Hospital in Westminster in London, Monday, March 13, 2023. Thousands of junior hospital doctors are due to walk out for three days starting Monday. It follows strikes in recent months by nurses and ambulance staff. The NHS said it would prioritize emergency care during the strike but thousands of appointments will be canceled. Credit: AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth

Tens of thousands of junior doctors went on strike across England on Monday to demand better pay, kicking off three days of widespread disruption at the U.K.'s state-funded hospitals and health clinics.

Junior doctors make up 45% of all NHS doctors. Senior doctors and other medics have had to be drafted in to cover for [emergency services](#), [critical care](#) and maternity services.

The British Medical Association, the doctors' trade union, says pay for [junior doctors](#) has fallen 26% in real terms since 2008, while workload and patient waiting lists are at record highs. The union says burnout and the U.K.'s cost-of-living crisis are driving doctors away from the public health service.

The union said newly qualified medics earn just 14.09 pounds (\$17) an hour.

Other health workers, including nurses and paramedics, have also staged strikes in recent months to demand better pay and conditions. NHS figures show that more than 100,000 appointments have already been postponed this winter as a result of the nurses' walkouts.

Stephen Powis, medical director of NHS England, said the 72-hour strike this week is expected to have the most serious impact and will cause "extensive disruption."

He said some [cancer care](#) will likely be affected, alongside routine appointments and some operations.



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Prime Minister Rishi Sunak told reporters on Sunday it was "disappointing that the junior doctors' union are not engaging with the government." The doctors' union said officials have refused to engage with their demands for months, and that a recent invitation to talks came with "unacceptable" preconditions.

The doctors' strike this week will coincide with mass walkouts by tens of

thousands of teachers and [civil servants](#) on Wednesday, the day the government unveils its latest budget statement.

A wave of strikes has disrupted Britons' lives for months, as workers demand pay raises to keep pace with soaring inflation, which stood at 10.1% in January. That was down from a November peak of 11.1%, but is still the highest in 40 years.

Scores of others in the public sector, including train drivers, airport baggage handlers, border staff, driving examiners, bus drivers and postal workers have all walked off their jobs to demand higher pay.

Unions say wages, especially in the [public sector](#), have fallen in real terms over the past decade, and a cost-of-living crisis fueled by sharply rising food and energy prices has left many struggling to pay their bills.

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