

S. Korean senior doctors to resign in support of junior medics' walkout

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A group of South Korean senior doctors said Saturday that they would resign starting March 25 in support of junior medics in a nearly month-long strike over government training reforms that has plunged hospitals

into chaos.

Thousands of trainee doctors stopped working on February 20 to protest government reforms aimed at easing doctor shortages by increasing the number of medical students—which the medics claim is the final straw for overworked and underpaid early career professionals.

Crucial surgeries and treatments have been cancelled, but the government says the country has so far avoided a full-blown crisis thanks in part to nurses and senior doctors stepping up, as well as military medics who have been sent in to help.

Representatives of medical professors at 20 universities—who are also senior doctors at general hospitals—held a meeting late Friday, with those at 16 institutions "overwhelmingly in favor" of supporting their junior colleagues, said Bang Jae-seung, the head of the group.

Professors at "each university have decided to voluntarily submit resignation letters starting from March 25th", Bang told reporters Saturday.

But "we have reached a consensus that until the resignation is finalized, each individual should do their best in the treatment of patients in their respective positions, just as they have done so far", he added.

Bang did not disclose the exact number of professors expected to walk off the job on March 25th.

The [health ministry](#) this week reiterated that negotiations over the reform plans were out of the question, saying it would implement the health care reforms "without wavering".

The government has ordered junior medics to return or face [legal action](#),

and has moved to suspend the medical licenses of those who refuse to comply, while offering incentives and setting up a hotline to support any who defy the walkout.

Seoul is pushing to admit 2,000 more students to medical schools annually from next year to address what it says is one of the lowest doctor-to-population ratios among developed nations.

Bang said Saturday that doctors cannot agree to an increase of 2,000 more students under any circumstances.

"We request the government once again. Please reconsider the figure of 2,000. Without this, initiating any negotiation will be impossible," he said.

"If the current situation continues, it won't be long before university hospitals collapse, dealing a significant and long-lasting blow to our country's medical system," he added.

Doctors say they fear the reform will erode the quality of service and [medical education](#), but proponents of the plan accuse them of trying to safeguard their salaries and social status.

This week, the [junior doctors](#) said they had submitted a "letter requesting emergency intervention" from the International Labor Organization (ILO), claiming they were being "forced" by the government into unwanted labor. The government has dismissed the claim.

The reform plan enjoys broad public support, but a new poll by local media found 34 percent of people wanted the government to negotiate to end the standoff.

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