

Dr Sarah Wollaston MP
Chair, Health Select Committee
House of Commons
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5 April 2016

Dear Dr Wollaston,

Inquiry into the escalating crisis in the NHS in England in relation to the junior doctors' contract

We write on behalf of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (RCPE) to urge the Health Select Committee to intervene and conduct an inquiry into the escalating crisis in the NHS in England relating to the new junior doctors' contract and their morale and well-being.

The RCPE is a professional standard-setting and membership organisation. A significant proportion of our 12,000 Members and Fellows are junior doctors working in the NHS in England.

Junior doctors' contract

The UK Government's plans to impose the junior doctor contract in England from August 2016 have created significant discontent in the profession. As a Royal College, we believe that imposing this contract will jeopardise the future of the NHS and compromise the provision of safe patient care by undervaluing and demotivating a group of doctors already under significant pressure.

The medical profession is already facing severe difficulties in the recruitment and retention of staff. The latest census of consultant physicians and higher specialty trainees in the UK highlighted that one fifth of consultants state that rota gaps are causing 'significant problems for patient safety'. The imposition of this contract will have serious repercussions for the profession as a whole as it struggles to extend services whilst dealing with financial constraints. Exacerbating this will have an immediate and long-term risk for patient safety and the wider NHS.

Impact on those working less than full time

The evolution of the medical workforce has been a positive step forward for the NHS, and diversity and flexibility must be encouraged. It is essential that any new contract is fair to all doctors. The UK Government's Equality Analysis has highlighted that those working less than full time - disproportionately women - may be adversely affected by the new contract. By treating the medical female workforce in this manner, the Department of Health risks undermining legislative and cultural progress in relation to gender equality and losing the confidence of the medical – and other – professions. This is extremely worrying.

As the situation has escalated further following the release of the terms and conditions of the new contract and the Equality Analysis last week, we feel an impartial inquiry conducted by the Health Select Committee is fundamental to ensuring stability within the junior doctor workforce in England.

Review of junior doctors' morale and well-being

The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, of which we are part, may undertake a review of junior doctors' morale and well-being. However, it is likely to be limited in scope and will not address issues such as the terms and conditions of service for junior doctors and will, therefore, have limited value.

We therefore request that the Health Select Committee intervene as a matter of urgency to undertake an inquiry into all issues around the junior doctors' contract and explore the potential longer-term and wider impact on the medical workforce and patient care. It should also consider how a more constructive approach to the changing workforce can deliver the world class healthcare system that we all rely upon and which delivers excellent, safe patient care. A constructive cross-party intervention of this nature would allow all matters to be discussed transparently and objectively in a public forum and could facilitate the timely resolution of the current - and growing - difficulties.

Future NHS workforce

There is enormous potential to improve the morale of current and future generations of junior doctors. We have a duty to our doctors in training, the general public and our patients to ensure that any review is unbiased, impartial, comprehensive and appropriately timed. A limited review will not offer recommendations that are of benefit to any of these key groups of people.

We therefore feel it is vital to have an impartial inquiry into the mounting problems in relation to the junior doctor contract and issues affecting junior doctors' morale and wellbeing. We would welcome further constructive discussion of our concerns with you and your Committee.

Yours sincerely,



Prof Derek Bell, President

Dr Katherine Walesby, Chair of the Trainees and Members' Committee

Dr Marion Slater, Co-Chair of the Recently Appointed Consultants (RAC) Committee

Dr Catherine Labinjoh, Co-Chair of the Recently Appointed Consultants (RAC) Committee

Copied to: Rt Hon David Cameron MP
Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Members of the Health Select Committee
Huw Yardley, Committee Clerk