



OCTOBER 2015

As you will all now be aware, in line with the DDRB recommendations, the Government decided to impose a new contract on all Junior Doctors working in England as from August next year. You may also be aware that the Scottish and Welsh Governments decided not to implement these changes. The details of the new contract are readily available on the [gov.uk website](http://gov.uk) as are the [BMA's interpretation and response](#) and most of the Medical Royal Colleges, including the Colleges in Scotland, have expressed their concerns to the Secretary of State for Health and urged him to reconsider the Government's stance. At the present time, the Secretary for State has indicated that he is willing to address the concerns of junior doctors and the Colleges, but we are still awaiting re-opening of contract negotiations with the BMA's junior doctors' committee.

The Association of Coloproctology has a clear responsibility for the wellbeing of trainees working in our hard-pressed specialty and therefore wishes to make

its own statement on the impact of the proposed changes and to offer some advice. The most worrying aspect of the recommendations is the impact on patient safety. The contract proposed effectively removes the safeguards that already exist to inhibit Trusts from demanding hours of work that will pose a real threat to safe working practices. The effect of this will be felt particularly acutely by trainees working in General Surgery and/or Coloproctology and we are running the risk of reverting to the inhumane conditions of the past, which resulted in potentially fatal errors brought about by exhaustion.

Another serious consequence relates to recruitment and retention. Even now the NHS has difficulty in filling front line medical posts, and by making terms and conditions even less attractive, this can only be exacerbated. Increasingly young doctors are leaving the UK, or leaving the medical profession all together, and it is difficult to see how the NHS can continue to function effectively in the face of this trend. Training is also under attack from these changes; in recent years we have seen a steady change towards a consultant-delivered service so that the emphasis for junior doctors is shifting from service provision to training. We



could easily see this reversed by these proposals which are clearly intended to provide inexpensive cover for unsocial times of day.

Junior doctors are the NHS's most precious resource - they are its future. Successful businesses cherish their workforce because they know that the happiness of their employees is directly related to their business outcomes. Why should the NHS be different? Junior doctors are deeply unhappy as they feel unappreciated and ignored. For the future of the NHS this must change. So what can we do? The BMA negotiators have walked away from the table and the threat of strike action is looming. For a caring profession striking is not only counter-intuitive it is also bad for our relationships with the people we care for. Strike action must be a last resort and a determined effort to avert it is essential to retain the confidence of our patients.

If you feel strongly about this there are actions that we can all take to further the cause of a safe and contented NHS. Firstly, lobby your local MP. MPs are obliged to meet with their constituents, so, as long as you are a registered voter, you have every right to express your concerns to the people who have to vote on this issue. The power of speaking face to face to an MP should never be underestimated and we would urge everyone to take this opportunity. Secondly, keep in touch with the BMA's junior doctors' committee through your regional Chair and attend regional meetings. Thirdly, attend regional NHS

Employers Consultative Meetings and voice your point of view. Fourthly, use social media and write to newspapers; a letter in the Times is still an extremely powerful weapon. Finally, it has been suggested that contacting the GMC to request a certificate of good standing might provide a strong message as these are needed if you wish to work abroad. The more doctors who apply for one, the stronger the message.

Finally I want to stress that ACPGBI is committed to doing all we can to improve the terms and conditions of all Coloproctologists. We are not a trade union and we cannot negotiate directly, but we can and will act as a voice for our members.

Professor R J C Steele

President, ACPGBI 2015-2016

