

# British junior doctors speak from the picket lines

Our reporters  
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*World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke to workers on junior doctors' picket lines during their strike Wednesday. At London's Charing Cross hospital, the picket line was supported by passing motorists who tooted their horns and cheered as they drove by.

Sophie is a junior doctor at the hospital. She said, "We are fighting against the cuts to doctors' numbers per a set amount of patients and fighting against an increase in hours. We are also opposed to patients being refused care at their local hospital and being forced to travel long distances to another hospital to receive the same treatment."

Sophie said she would read the coverage of the dispute on the NHS FightBack website. NHS FightBack was initiated by the Socialist Equality Party to oppose privatisation and the unprecedented attacks on pay and conditions of health workers.

At the Manchester Royal Infirmary on Oxford Road, reporters spoke to Nabhi, who has been a doctor since 2001. He said, "I am an immigrant doctor from India, where there is no social medicine at all, especially for the poor and non-wealthy. I was originally going to go to the United States but it is the same there.

"I was sick of saying no to people who needed medical care and was drawn to the UK because of the NHS. But now we are going back to the dark ages here. Last week, I worked 108 hours. The new contract will make it even easier for us to work hours beyond what's safe."

A trainee surgeon named Alice said, "The term 'junior hospital doctor' is very misleading. You do five years in medical school, two years foundation and then you train to specialize. It takes 10 years to train as a surgeon. So, a junior hospital doctor can be in his or her 30s or 40s, with children and a mortgage, not someone fresh out of medical school. If you take any

time out of training, for example, to have a baby or do research, then you have to go back to your original pay band.

"This year, 70 percent of junior doctors haven't applied for specialist training because of the new contract. Last year, the figure was 50 percent. It's a disaster.

"Yesterday, we had someone needing their appendix removed. We were ready to go to theatre, we had a surgeon, but then a kidney transplant came along, and we did not have enough staff to open another theatre, so the appendix operation was cancelled.

"Everything is being privatised from catering to parking. Take the cleaners, they used to clean their own ward and build up a connection and have pride in their work. All that is being slowly eroded with privatisation. If the contract goes through, no one will want to become a doctor."

Karl, a trainee doctor, said, "Nobody wanted to strike, but we've been forced into a corner. [Health Secretary Jeremy] Hunt says he wants to negotiate, but it's all bluster. If they do impose the contract, I hope everyone resigns en masse. It's all part of a ploy to privatise the NHS. The government backs the private health care model. A survey was released claiming public dissatisfaction with the NHS is at an all-time high. The government is just trying to use doctors as scapegoats to destabilise and destroy the NHS."

A junior doctor named Peter said, "The government and media mislead the public about our salaries which are more like £27,000 rather than the high figures they quote. If they lie about this, you can't believe them about anything."

Lisa is training to be a nurse. She said, "I'm here to protest the cuts and the ending of the student nurse bursary. Without the bursary, which is under attack, I

wouldn't be able to train. Fifty percent of health care students have a first degree, and 50 percent are over 29. They won't be able to train to become nurses, as it would mean accumulating debts of over £50,000. I've looked at your NHS Fightback website and found it very informative."

At the Sheffield Children's Hospital, Sarah, a junior doctor, said, "The government is trying to privatise the NHS. This is not about the money we are paid, it's about keeping the NHS accessible and available for everybody.

"I don't think the way the newspapers and media have reported on our fight is correct. I think the BMA are trying to get a safe contract that would mean doctors are not being overworked. They are fighting for the safety of doctors and patients."

Aadita said, "The NHS is an ideal system. Lots of countries around the world would like to have a system such as the NHS. But the Tories are targeting us now and tomorrow it will be the nurses."

John, a junior doctor, described one of the government's weekend working proposals: "They have proposed to have a person called a 'guardian' who will oversee complaints from doctors regarding their work time. If there has been any breach of the agreement on, say, pay and hours, the guardian will penalise the department with a fine, a portion of which will go to make up the lost wages of the doctor."

Such a scheme would cause even more debt to the hospital department, and "any doctor who reports an incident could be looked on as a trouble maker."

Calum, standing outside the Children's Hospital near the picket line, said, "I agree with them, they should be on strike." He was at the hospital as his daughter Rosie had been in intensive care there for five weeks after being involved in a traffic accident.

Alan, a paediatric doctor at the Children's Hospital, said, "There aren't enough doctors in the NHS. In my field, over 20 percent of positions are not filled. The government is not offering any more money or training. We already work weekends and have done so for a long time. This is not the issue. If we work more on Saturdays and Sundays, what happens during the week? There won't be enough doctors, and this will create health and safety risks, and patient care will suffer. This is about a pay cut.

"The junior doctors are the first to have their

contracts due for renewal. The consultants and nurses and all other sectors are due after us. We are just the first in a long line to follow."

At Leeds General Hospital, radiology trainee John said, "There are a lot of reasons for our strike, it is a part of a wider fight to save the NHS. We feel the government has gone after the junior doctors first, because maybe they feel we are a soft target. By trying to break our pay and conditions, they might feel it will be easier then to move on to other health care workers such as nurses, radiographers and assistants.

"I am glad the BMA involved [the arbitration service] ACAS, but I feel in many respects many concessions have been made by the BMA."

John opposed the plans to end bursaries for nursing students: "Jeremy Hunt and [Tory Chancellor] George Osborne have no idea what nurses do. These aren't young people just sitting around in a library reading a book. These are people on wards doing a job, and without that work that they put in the nurses would generally struggle.

"I am a doctor that has worked on wards before, and time and again nursing students have been used to pad out numbers on poorly staffed wards. So the fact that they are not even going to get a bursary for a job they are doing is disgraceful.

"This fight affects us all, and I think it is a good time for doctors, nurses, medical students and nursing students to join together against a government that wants to erode the NHS."



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