

UK ambulance staff quitting in record numbers

Ben Trent
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Tens of thousands of ambulance staff have quit Britain's National Health Service (NHS).

The figures, uncovered by a Labour Party-led investigation, are staggering. Fully 33,414 paramedics, technicians and office staff have quit their jobs since 2010—the year the Conservatives came to power in coalition with the Liberal Democrats.

The number leaving the profession has increased by 80 percent in the last nine years, with 2,704 leavers in 2010-2011, to 4,875 leaving in the period 2017-18. 2016-17 saw a collective 5,002 staff leave the service.

The London Ambulance Service (LAS) saw the highest number of leavers, with a loss of 4,097 staff. LAS has the highest staffing of the ambulance services, a total of 5,686 employees.

The latest rapid departures are part of an ever-increasing litany of medical professionals abandoning the National Health Service. Figures released in early 2018 revealed the rate the NHS was “haemorrhaging nurses,” while survey results in the latter half of 2018 revealed the likelihood that one in three GPs planned to quit over the next five years.

Tory Health Minister Stephen Hammond fired back at the Labour Party for uncovering the revelations, claiming that “paramedic numbers are up 40 percent and there are 3,800 more ambulance staff working in the NHS than there were in 2010.” This fails to address either the impact of the rate of departures or the growth of the populace in the last decade putting greater demand on the NHS.

Another report by Labour highlighted the 200,000 nurses who had left the NHS since 2010. Three quarters of those who had left—160,000—quit for reasons other than retirement, with a 55 percent increase in the number of voluntary resignations. 2017-18 saw 18,013 voluntary resignations citing poor work-life balance as

the principal cause. The report also highlighted that 14.6 percent of doctors had quit in 2017-18 alone.

Earlier this year, the *Guardian* reported that two in five NHS staff felt sick from the stress of their job. The figures from the NHS staff survey, which saw responses from 497,000 of its 1.2 million workers, revealed what experts referred to as an “alarming downturn” in staff well-being. Increasing numbers of workers cite the inability to cope under the increased strain of understaffing, and years of deep budget cuts for their own decline in well-being.

Results from that survey highlighted that 51 percent of staff wanted to quit their current role, whilst 21 percent wanted to leave the NHS altogether. A massive 78 percent of respondents felt that they were under unachievable time constraints for some or all of the time, and a further 58 percent declared that they worked unpaid overtime every week.

The *Guardian* referred to the 100,000 unfilled vacancies across the National Health Service—one out of every 11 jobs. This was echoed in the survey, by 46 percent of staff declaring that their trusts were inadequately staffed to be able to do their jobs properly.

In a joint report—“Closing the gap” by Nuffield Trust, the King’s Trust and the Health Foundation—predictions were made that nursing shortages would double (to 70,000), while GP shortages would treble (to 7,000) in just five years. The shortages would, as the report states, make the goals set out in the Conservatives’ Long-Term Plan (LTP) entirely unachievable.

The report makes demands of an increase in spending by £900 million a year, to “radically expand” nursing training, as well as altering the Immigrant White Paper to source nurses from abroad. In terms of GPs, the report clearly states that it “cannot be filled at all.”

Such a stark warning makes clear that even radical changes within the capitalist system aren't capable of repairing the damage of slash and burns style cuts and privatization measures in the NHS that have continued under successive Labour and Conservative governments. Not that the financial elites would even consider any modest alterations to the wholesale dismemberment of the health service for private firms to consume.

In March of this year, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) released a damning verdict on the use of private ambulance services, something the NHS has had to rely on more and more due to the gutting of its own services.

In an article by the *Independent*, details of the CQC reports highlighted an instance whereby one private ambulance provider was “based in a hotel room and did not store controlled drugs appropriately, a paramedic who had their drug bag under their bed in a B&B, and morphine books with pages missing, illegible entries and incorrect information.” In another instance, operators transporting patients on dialysis had no forms of monitoring travel time, fluid and nutrition and toilet breaks.

The report stated, “Some patient transport services were operating in a manner more like a taxi than an ambulance service” and cited one particular instance where “an extremely confused dialysis patient was found wandering in the street by neighbours, as the crew had not made sure that he got into his home safely.”

Various concerning details emerged, including a clear lack of adequate training, lack of pre-employment checks (i.e., driving licence, references or health checks) as well as poor maintenance of equipment and vehicles.

The NHS must be defended, but this struggle cannot be waged inside the bureaucratic unions who have continually betrayed workers for decades, or within the confines of the Labour Party.

The Labour Party's concerns over NHS and the fate of its staff is simply hot air. It spent 13 years in power from 1997 to 2010 undermining the NHS. Labour's record includes establishing semi-autonomous business entities called NHS Foundation Trusts, implementing Prime Minister John Major's plan of Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs) that have created huge debts and

laying out an austerity plan that included £20 billion cuts to the NHS prior to 2010.

Most criminal of all was the suppressing of class struggle against the Tories in collaboration with the trade unions.

The struggle to defend the NHS can only be waged on the basis of the fight to build an independent party of the working class, based on a socialist perspective. This is the programme fought for by the Socialist Equality Party and its NHS Fightback campaign initiative.

For further information visit NHS FightBack and like/share our Facebook page.



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