

# National resident doctors strike in England over pay and jobs

**Our reporters**  
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Tens of thousands of National Health Service (NHS) resident doctors in England began their 15th round of strike action since March 2023 on Tuesday morning. The action in pursuit of “full pay restoration” will be their longest yet, lasting for six days. The strike follows the collapse of talks between the British Medical Association (BMA) and Labour government Health Secretary Wes Streeting.

After denouncing the demands of the doctors for a 26 percent pay rise as “absurd”, Streeting warned that a strike would “torpedo the pay rises and training posts available to resident doctors, but it also puts at risk the recovery of the NHS.”

Streeting’s offer consists of a below RPI inflation percent pay award, after an initial deal when Labour took office that left pay still 21 percent behind real terms 2008 levels. He has offered just 4,000 additional specialty training posts over three years, repurposed jobs not new ones.

Speaking to the BBC’s *Today* show Tuesday, BMA Residents Doctors Committee (RDC) leader Dr. Jack Fletcher said the union had done everything possible to avoid a strike. They were not seeking “about a billions pounds” in lost pay in “one go, overnight.” Without specifying a percentage figure as a bottom line, he declared, “We’re asking for a credible journey back to what doctors were paid and worth in 2008”.

WSWS reporters spoke to striking doctors on picket lines nationwide.

## **London St Thomas' Hospital**

The central London hospital stands across the River Thames from Parliament. Among the dozen resident doctors who held up BMA placards some had produced their own: “21% pay cut for doctors, 5% rise for MPs: No wonder the NHS is falling apart”; “7.2 million on NHS waiting lists, while the government cancels training jobs for 1,000 future GPs and consultants. Does this make sense?”

Dr. Andrew Meyerson who works in A&E said, “This is now the 15th time that we’ve had to go on strike to make sure that we are paid a reasonable salary. I’m from the United States. I could go back and earn \$400,000 a year as an A&E doctor. I choose to stay here in the NHS because I love it. I don’t have to ask my patients for a credit card. I don’t have to talk about money.

“It is ridiculous after everything we’ve been through, government after government failing on NHS policy, from preparing for the pandemic to having adequate staffing numbers, enough beds, enough colleagues to work with.

“We’re losing 20,000 doctors a year, 40,000 nurses a year. Patients are dying on waiting lists, and they die in our waiting rooms, and we are fed up. We’re standing up for ourselves, and for our patients and the NHS.

“It is absurd with the worst waiting list in NHS history that we have unemployed doctors. It feels like they are trying to delay the NHS recovery to force as many of us and as many patients as possible into the private sector.

“We have our consultants lining up for industrial action, our General Practitioners. There is deep frustration within the medical workforce because we have not been listened to.

“If we had united action between us and the nurses for patients to demand proper staffing levels in the NHS, we could move mountains in terms of patient safety.

## **Manchester Royal Infirmary**

At Manchester Royal Infirmary pickets chanted, “What do we want, more jobs, when do we want it? Now! What do we want, fair pay, when do we want it? Now! How do we get it? Strike!”

**Gabriel** is a GP trainee based at a GP practice. **Ryan** has worked as a trainee doctor but is presently without work.

Asked his thoughts on Prime Minister Keir Starmer comment that the strike was “reckless” and Streeting’s that their demands were “absurd”, Gabriel said, “I’ll take it MP’s 5 percent pay rise wasn’t absurd. It’s only absurd when other people want it. What is absurd is how our wage has been suppressed since 2008.”

The pay deal won when Labour came to power was “a start, but it didn’t rectify the wage suppression we had. What’s important to bear in mind is that the pay rise came off the back of incredibly high inflation.

“The DDRB [Doctors’ and Dentists’ Remuneration] is our independent review body, which has historically not been suggesting very high amounts. So, if we create a three year pay deal attached to the DDRB recommendation... then we can end up having sub-inflationary pay rises for the next three years, because we’re expecting inflation to rocket...”

Streeting had previously denounced striking doctors as “moaning minnies”. Gabriel said, “I think my opinion of the Labour Party switched there... Although a lot of the people that I speak to regularly were already going to strike, this has been the reason why many people have decided to strike. They’re like, OK, ‘shove it’”.

A WSWS reporter noted that the government was refusing to pay £1.7 billion to settle the doctors pay claim but was preparing to

spend ten times that amount annually on the military budget. Gabriel said, “The money exists. There always seems to be if they need it to deport people on a plane to a foreign country, or create some sort of prison barge, or when the Tories get in bed with a political party in Ireland, I think they gave them [Democratic Unionist Party] a couple of billion.”

Gabriel had seen the comments of anonymous union leaders this week in the *Guardian* criticising resident doctors for striking for a double digit pay deal, because it made it more difficult for them to sell shoddy deals to their members. He responded, “I think a lot of people like the politics of being in the management of the union” and “can be more interested in a career than serving the people you're supposed to be supporting. Some people are in for a little cosy ride.”

Ryan said, “I'm currently unemployed. The competition ratios for some of these specialities are 20 to 1. When I have been in hospital, the job is intense. Most days, there are one or two vacancies on the on-call team, which are the people who attend if your heart stops beating.”

**Ken**, a trainee dietician, said the doctors struggle was as important as the Birmingham bin workers strike and was “an inspiration” for workers “across the country.” Asked his view on Streeting’s attacks he said, “It’s a very pro-capitalist government. They’re going to continue austerity in order to fund a war... employ the soldiers and continue the imperialist agenda the US is leading.”

Ken supported NHS workers fighting in a unified struggle, saying, “That’s what history tells us. It’s always the mass of people coalescing and using their strength in numbers and never relying on a few officials to get work done for them.”

#### **Sheffield Royal Hallamshire Hospital**

Around 20 pickets gathered with a large banner demanding an end to the involvement of US tech giant Palantir in the NHS. The Starmer government has signed a £330 million deal to supply an NHS Federated Data Platform with Palantir Technologies—a firm that has provided data analytics and targeting support to US and Israeli military and intelligence agencies. Palantir is implicated in surveillance and targeting operations during Israel’s genocide in Gaza.

**Rory**, a GP said, “We’re in this awful situation. There are not enough doctors on hospital wards. There are a huge number of vacancies around the country. There’s a huge bottleneck for training positions, due to years of underfunding the NHS.

“Sometimes it’s hard to notice the impact of privatisation on the ward. It’s often done by the back door. The private companies only take the fittest patients and often when there’s any complications, that’s left to the NHS.

“I work in general practice, where you build close relationships with your patients. I don’t like to tell them I’m on strike. But I know what we’re doing is for the greater good, because this is a way to achieve increased funding so there are doctors and people don’t have to wait weeks.

“We often find our struggles are pitted against each other, but workers’ rights aren’t about that. It is not about competition. We do this in solidarity with the nurses, with healthcare assistants, with teachers, with people who work in other public services. We need all workers struggle to be put back into the spotlight,

realising that we do this for each other.”

**Zin**, a recently qualified resident doctor, said, “I’ve been on strike every time, but it’s the first time as a qualified doctor.

“It’s really demoralising to spend five or six years in training, another two years in foundation training, and then countless years after specialising in whatever it may be and not feel like you are doing right by your patients because of things like understaffing and cuts to services.

“It’s important that doctors are advocates for their patients and their NHS colleagues, not just doctors but nurses, other allied practitioners—and that they speak up about the conditions. I completely agree with organising the rank-and-file throughout the health service.

“We are striving for safety to feel valued at work and we want that for our patients. The NHS is going in the opposite direction because of countless cuts to pay and to services.

“Privatisation is proceeding quickly in some areas and erodes that relationship with patients. These companies see patients as profit. Doctors are in the business of saving lives and helping people.”

#### **Leeds General Infirmary**

**Francesco**, an Emergency Medicine specialist trainee and deputy chair of the BMA’s Yorkshire RDC said, “We all want an NHS that’s fit for the future. I think if Nye Bevan [Labour minister who launched the NHS in 1948] was around today, he’d be appalled.

“When I started in 2018 people maybe would wait four hours to see a physician in A&E, now they wait 12 hours. I see patients sometimes waiting 24 hours or 36 hours for a bed.

“The Labour Party, supposedly the party of the NHS, are in power so what are they doing to increase capacity? Nothing. What are they doing to make life easier for the staff? Nothing. They make it worse by setting us new targets and new goals with absolutely zero more resources other than another manager at the top to whip us into compliance.

“The government have the money where they want to spend it. The NHS budget is £247 billion... but pay restoration for doctors cost £1.7 billion, so less than half a percent of that.

“As soon as anything major happens, suddenly the government has lots of money to spend on it. If we suddenly need a new warship, we can spend money on it. There are always billions for bombs and pennies for patients.”

*Resident doctors can read the NHS FightBack statement on the strike here and sign-up for our regular Newsletter and contact us here:*



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