Industrial action on the changes to junior doctors and dentists’ contracts

Meeting with Members of Parliament
10th February 2016

The BDA

The British Dental Association (BDA) is the voice of dentists and dental students in the UK, serving as their professional body and trade union. Founded in 1880, and owned entirely by its members, the BDA is able to focus solely on its mission to promote the interests of its members; advance the science, arts and ethics of dentistry, and improve the nation’s oral health.

Background

Tooth decay is the number one cause of hospital admissions for small children. A large number of dentists work in hospitals, many in the maxillofacial units, which specialise in the treating the diseases and injuries of the head, neck face and jaws. As such these dentists are employed on the basis of the junior doctor and consultant contracts, and the BDA is a party to the current contract dispute.

The BDA balloted its junior hospital dentist members and they voted overwhelming to take action at the same time as their medical colleagues.

Why we think the contract is unsafe and unfair

Removal of vital safeguards for dentists and patients

- Patients are put at risk when doctors and dentists are overworked and don’t get proper rest. Currently, there are limits to prevent employers overworking their clinicians, and there are rules about how much rest and how many breaks doctors and dentists should receive.

- The current contract contains a mechanism to ensure that these rules are enforced; employers who don’t stick to the limits are penalised financially. The Government wants to remove this safety net but has no real plan to replace it.

- The Government has already told the BMA that it plans to reduce the number of breaks during shifts down to just 20 minutes every six hours. In practice, this could mean that a dentist working an eleven-hour shift will only get one 20-minute break. We don’t think this would be safe.
Extension of standard time

- Under the current contract, standard time is set as 7am to 7pm, Monday to Friday. Junior doctors and dentists routinely work outside of ‘standard time’ in order to provide patients with high-quality care around the clock. When they do so, they receive a pay premium (as part of their banding supplement). This is to reflect the impact that working evenings, nights, Saturdays and Sundays has on personal and family life. The Government no longer intends to recognise the impact of working evenings and Saturdays, planning to extend standard time to 7am to 9pm, Monday to Saturday.

- Only nights and Sundays would be paid at a higher rate, with Sundays being less valued than nights. The Government wants doctors and dentists to continue to work evenings and Saturdays, but reduce the rate of pay for them. This means that 30 hours currently paid at a premium would move into standard time, and working a Saturday would be paid at the same rate as working a Tuesday.

- This proposed system would not value dentists’ time appropriately. Evenings and weekends are an important time for family and social life and should be recognised as such. Removing the current compensation for working during this time is not fair on dentists or their families and risks making a career in medicine less attractive. If it costs less to employ a junior doctor or dentist during evenings and weekends, we believe that employers are likely to use juniors as a way of staffing seven-day services more cheaply, with junior doctors and dentists likely to end up working fewer hours in the day, and more hours at evenings and weekends.

Pay progression

- At the moment, trainees’ pay increases every year in recognition of the experience gained over that time. The Government believes that pay should only rise when a trainee moves to the next stage of their training and responsibility.

- The Government plans to introduce flexible pay premia that could provide a limited amount of support for some, but not all, trainees who would be affected by this change. We believe the premia are unlikely to match the benefits of the current system.

- Trainees who change specialty would also be at a disadvantage because of the proposal to end pay protection. A flexible pay premia has also been proposed to limit this disadvantage but, again, these are unlikely to match the benefits of the current system and are likely to be variable.

Contact us:

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