

Position Statement on industrial action

Embargoed until 4pm on Tuesday 21 February 2023

The BMA ballot results were announced yesterday, with 98% of 47,692 doctors in England voting for industrial action.¹ In less than two weeks, for the fourth time this year, nurses will also strike and for the first time, intensive care will not be a derogated area.² Furthermore, we have also seen physiotherapists striking twice this year.³

The Society stands firm on its position that urgent action is required to address this escalating healthcare workforce crisis.⁴ The fact that doctors, nurses and physiotherapists have opted for industrial action is a strong sign that the government must do more to make significant changes and investment in the NHS workforce, both in the short and the long-term.

Preserving patient safety and achieving the best outcomes requires a sufficient and stable workforce of highly qualified professionals. Intensive care staff not only look after the sickest patients within the walls of the intensive care unit (ICU), they also support the entire hospital. Insufficient workforce investment results in lower resources compromising patient safety. Intensive care is not just a location where the sickest patients go, it represents an integral multi-professional service that no hospital can operate without.

This level of care requires the right numbers of people with the right skills in the right places, and so all roads lead us back to workforce. To ignore the ongoing issues around pay and working conditions not only puts our current workforce at risk but ultimately impacts patient safety and the ability to provide the planned and emergency care needed in any hospital.

A survey conducted by the BMA revealed four in 10 doctors plan to leave the NHS, with 33% planning to move abroad.⁵ One in nine nurses left the NHS between 2021 and 2022 with an estimated average of 17,000 nursing posts unfulfilled on any given day.⁶ Training more staff is only part of the solution - retaining our experienced staff is vital to maintaining our position.

The existing shortages and the lack of ability to meet the staffing standards as outlined in the Guidelines for the Provision of Intensive Care Services (GPICS)⁷ set by the Intensive Care Society and the Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine, carries the risk of pushing our workforce past breaking point and accelerating this unprecedented staff exodus, exacerbated by the effect of over a decade of unrelenting pressures and the current backlog of elective procedures.

Last year we welcomed the Government's commitment to a workforce plan with independently verified forecasts for the number of doctors, nurses, advanced practitioners in critical care, allied

health professionals and pharmacists needed in five, 10, and 15 years' time.⁸ We will keep making the case for increased funding to underpin that strategy and for it to include a range of solutions on both staff retention and recruitment.

Intensive Care Society President, Dr Steve Mathieu, says "Ensuring Intensive Care staff are valued, supported in their career progression and have terms and conditions of employment commensurate with their responsibilities is the cornerstone of retention and therefore staffing standards. This is inextricably linked with quality care, better outcomes and patient safety".

Intensive Care is an incredibly rewarding but highly labour and skills intensive specialty even in 'normal' times. A failure to immediately invest in healthcare professionals puts every hospital, patient and individual in England at risk.

We want our members to know that we support you and we're listening to your concerns. We hope the Government is doing the same and looking to implement a swift and sustainable solution.

Endorsing Organisations

1. Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Respiratory Care (ACPRC)
2. British Association of Critical Care Nurses (BACCN)
3. British Dietetics Association (BDA)
4. Psychologists in Intensive Care UK (PINC UK)
5. Royal College of Speech and Language Therapy (RCSLT)
6. UK Critical Care Nursing Alliance (UKCCNA)

References

7. <https://www.bma.org.uk/junior-ballot-successful>
8. <https://www.rcn.org.uk/Get-Involved/Campaign-with-us/Fair-Pay-for-Nursing/Strike-hub/Strike-locations>
9. <https://www.csp.org.uk/workplace/pay-conditions/industrial-action/ballot-outcomes>
10. <https://ics.ac.uk/resource/intensive-care-staffing-standards-and-the-nhs-workforce-crisis.html>
11. <https://www.bmj.com/content/379/bmj.o3066>
12. <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/resource/nursing-strikes-facts-and-figures-on-uk-nursing-staff>
13. <https://ics.ac.uk/guidance/gpics.html>
14. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/autumn-statement-2022-documents>

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