

GMB RESPONDS TO LATEST GOVERNMENT ATTACK ON NHS STAFF PAY

Government should drop its cuts agenda and get round the table to resolve the pay dispute instead, says GMB the NHS union

GMB has today called on the government to drop its controversial proposals to cut unsocial-hours payments and progression pay for NHS staff in England. The government should get round the negotiating table to solve the ongoing pay dispute instead, says GMB.

The options set out in a submission by the Department of Health to the NHS Pay Review Body include removing unsocial-hours rates entirely, changing the periods of time which are considered “unsocial”, and lowering the rates which apply on Sundays or bank holidays. The Department is also asking the review body to consider cost-saving measures in relation incremental pay progression (see Note 1 for more details).

The proposals comes in the midst of a pay dispute over the withholding of a 1% pay award for all NHS staff. The joint health unions have announced further strike action for Thursday 29 January in relation to this dispute. This will be a 12 hour stoppage from 9am-9pm in NHS hospitals, to be followed by a 24-hour stoppage on Wednesday 25 February, time to be confirmed (see Note 2 for more details). GMB Ambulance Representatives are meeting on Wednesday this week to agree the stoppage for January; currently a 48-hour stoppage for January 29th & 30th is being considered in the ambulance service.

GMB National Officer for the NHS, Rehana Azam, said: **“So this is the thank you that NHS staff get for keeping hospitals running despite incredible pressure on A&E and other services. What utter hypocrisy from Jeremy Hunt, to sing the praises of NHS staff while tabling proposals to cut their pay.**

“The government is taking the preposterous position that running more services seven days a week is not dependent on having more money and more staff. Jeremy Hunt largely stymied negotiations on progress toward a wider seven-day service in the NHS when he rejected the review body’s 2014/15 recommendation for a 1% pay award for all staff. He was warned by the review body that such a step would cause declining staff morale and engagement. The government has now exacerbated the situation by barring the review body from recommending a pay rise for 2015/16, and asking it instead to look at ways to cut NHS pay. That means a pay freeze on all rates back to 2013 rates and a potential proposal to cut overall pay for all NHS staff. What message does this send out to the hardworking NHS staff who are the backbone of the NHS, delivering patient care against a

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backdrop of cuts?

“GMB recognises the round-the-clock needs of the NHS and actually, the premiums for unsocial hours are there to help recruit and retain the necessary numbers of staff to meet these needs. This submission from the Department of Health is not really about extending and improving NHS services but about worsening the current pay arrangements. In our own joint evidence to the pay review body, the health unions will invite the pay review body to confirm that unsocial-hours payments currently act as an enabler to seven-day services, and that any reduction or removal would have a detrimental impact on the NHS’s ability to secure safe staffing levels.

“The government is also completely wrongheaded when it comes to incremental pay in the health service. The review body pointed out last year that it did not consider incremental pay to be costly, in net terms, because of new staff being recruited to the bottom of the scale, usually replacing staff at the top point. Why won’t the Health Secretary get the message?

“The health unions are always open to discussion. We have had regular meetings with the employers with a further one scheduled on Friday to discuss their interpretation of seven-day services. We also want to resolve the pay dispute but Jeremy Hunt still refuses to get round the table to negotiate. The government should drop its cuts agenda and start negotiating on the pay dispute instead.

“The NHS desperately needs a fair financial settlement. Hospitals and other services are understaffed and over-stretched. The pay review body has made the point that funding is a matter of political choice. We need a government prepared to invest in the NHS instead of taking the shirt off the backs of exceptionally hard-working staff.

End

Contact:

1) The Department of Health’s evidence to the NHS Pay Review Body

This is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evidence-for-pay-review-bodies-of-healthcare-professionals>, accompanied by a statement that “Government has asked the pay review bodies to consider and make observations on this evidence about barriers and enablers within NHS employment contracts for the delivery of affordable 7 day services ... Each pay review body will take evidence from the Department, NHS Employers, NHS England, Health Education

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England, NHS Providers and other interested parties and will report back by the end of July 2015.”

The Department’s evidence to the NHS Pay Review Body states that “The Pay Review Body is asked to give some consideration to the following potential barriers (which are not exhaustive) to sustainable seven day services:

- the periods of time classed as ‘unsocial’ in the NHS working week, given the nature of the service, patient needs, and modern societal norms
- the rates of pay on offer for unsocial hours in the NHS
- the structure of progression pay in Agenda for Change, and whether this is fair, affordable and sustainable” (p. 43).

The document states that: “It is our view that delivering seven day services is not dependent on more money and more staff, rather it is an opportunity for employers to look critically at how care is organised.” (p. 18).

2) Ongoing NHS dispute over pay

Below are the most recent GMB press releases on this dispute:

EMERGENCY COVER DURING AMBULANCE STRIKE

Friday, January 9, 2015

GMB Meeting To Assess Emergency Cover During Ambulance Strike On 29/30 Jan As New Figures Show A&E Departments Fail To Meet Targets

Both lay and full time officers are currently assessing the emergency cover that will be provided during the stoppage for the nearly two thirds of calls to the 999 service that are not classified as Red says GMB.

GMB, the union for NHS and ambulance staff, commented on new weekly figures which show that A&E departments fail to hit targets in week ending 4th Jan 2015. See notes to editors for copy on story on Press Association.

Last month GMB announced that members in the ambulance service in England and Northern Ireland are considering a 48 hour continuous strike at end January as part of an escalation of strike action with other health unions in the pay dispute in the NHS.

The two day stoppage by GMB members in the ambulance service, should it go ahead, will commence at 12 noon on January 29th and will continue until 12 noon on 31st January.

The joint health unions have announced further strike action for Thursday 29 January 2015. This will be a

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12 hour stoppage from 9am -9pm in NHS (Hospitals). This will be followed in February with a 24 hour stoppage on Wed 25th February 2015, time to be confirmed.

GMB will issue the necessary formal notices to all NHS employers including ambulance services in the coming weeks.

GMB members took part in the strike action in the NHS across England & Northern Ireland on 13th October and 24th November to demand that the Secretary of State for Health stops burying his head in Whitehall and meet with GMB and all health unions to resolve the dispute.

The four-hour stoppages were followed by action short of a strike with an overtime ban in the ambulance service and other NHS employees working to their contracted hours.

GMB conducted an official ballot of members in the NHS in England and Northern Ireland. There was overwhelming support for industrial action to secure a better offer. The pay offer for NHS staff in England and Northern Ireland is an unconsolidated 1% pay award in 2014, restricted to staff not eligible for incremental progression and the same approach in 2015. This goes against the recommendation of the independent NHS Pay Review Body for a 1% consolidated pay rise for all staff.

Rehana Azam said **"The situation is getting worse and our members in A&E departments and the ambulance service are doing a sterling job coping with the almost impossible demands being placed on them.**

Jeremy Hunt has praised staff for their efforts but he should put his money where his mouth is and honour their recommended pay award. That is what staff deserve. It is essential he does this very soon to avert further strike action later this month including a 48 hour walkout in the ambulance service on 29 and 30 January.

GMB officials dealing with the ambulance service are currently assessing the emergency cover that will be provided during the stoppage for the nearly two thirds of calls to the 999 service that are not classified as Red. "

End

Contact: Rehana Azam, GMB National Officer on 07841 181656 or GMB Regional Officers:

Birmingham & West Midlands Pauline Hinks on 07809 617 761, London & East of England Tony Hughes on 07738 958 142 or Steve Sweeney on 07703 469403, East Midlands, Les Dobbs on 07966 327 967, North East and Cumbria, Chris Jukes on 07870 176 733, North West, Lisa Ryan 07703 468 968 or Maria Almond 07718 113110, Northern Ireland, Michael Mulholland on 07974 018 413, South East, Nick Day on 07717 510 047, Wales & South West, Paul Gage on 07980 753 117 and Yorkshire, Joan Keane on 07958 156841 or GMB Press Office: 07921 289880 or 07974 251823.

Notes to editor.

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Copy on Press Association on the story:

A&E departments fail to hit targets

09 Jan 2015 - 12:38

By David Hughes, Press Association Political Correspondent

Accident and emergency units in England saw 86.7% of patients within four hours in the week ending January 4, failing to meet the 95% target.

The first set of weekly figures issued this year show that for "type 1" major A&E departments, just 79.8% of patients were dealt with within four hours.

Labour claimed the figures showed it was the "worst week the NHS has experienced in living memory".

The latest NHS England figures follow the quarterly statistics for the last three months of 2014 which showed that 92.6% of patients were seen within the four-hour target, the worst performance for a decade.

Some 407,239 patients attended A&E in the week to January 4, up by 5.1 % or almost 20,000 attendances on the same week 12 months ago, and an increase of almost 4,000 on the previous week.

The percentage of patients waiting four hours or less from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge was 86.7% - down from 90.5% in the previous week and 94.3% in the same week last year.

The NHS has also been stretched by high levels of influenza this winter, officials said.

Dr Sarah Pinto-Duschinsky, director of operations and delivery for NHS England, said: "The NHS continues to face unprecedented pressures on its frontline services - with almost 20,000 more A&E attendances than last year - and more than 105,000 people admitted to hospital which is one of the highest figures on record.

"The extra £700 million invested has bought 700 more doctors, 4,500 more nurses, creating over 5,000 more beds.

"Flu is now at its highest peak for the last three winters which is one of the reasons why over the New Year holiday we continued to treat more patients than ever before.

"This means the NHS will continue to be under pressure for the next few weeks. Even at this stage of the winter it is still worth people getting their flu jab if they have not done so, and get advice from their pharmacist for colds, coughs and minor conditions."

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NEW YEAR NHS STRIKES LOOM IN PAY DISPUTE

Tuesday, December 23, 2014

New Year Two Day Strike Looms In Ambulance Service And 12 Hours Strike In Rest Of NHS In England And Northern Ireland In Pay Dispute

New Year will bring a regrettable escalation of the strike action as staff have been left with no alternative with no meaningful talks in prospect says GMB.

GMB members in the ambulance service in England and Northern Ireland are considering a 48 hour continuous strike in the New Year as part of an escalation of strike action with other health unions in the pay dispute in the NHS.

The two day stoppage by GMB members in the ambulance service, should it go ahead, will commence at 12 noon on January 29th and will continue until 12 noon on 31st January.

The joint health unions have announced further strike action for Thursday 29 January 2015. This will be a 12 hour stoppage from 9am -9pm in NHS (Hospitals). This will be followed in February with a 24 hour stoppage on Wednesday 25 February 2015, time to be confirmed. See below for text of joint statement from the health unions on 19th December 2014.

GMB will issue the necessary formal notices to all NHS employers including ambulance services in the coming weeks.

GMB members took part in the strike action in the NHS across England & Northern Ireland on 13th October and 24th November to demand that the Secretary of State for Health stops burying his head in Whitehall and meet with GMB and all health unions to resolve the dispute.

The four-hour stoppages were followed by action short of a strike with an overtime ban in the ambulance service and other NHS employees working to their contracted hours.

GMB conducted an official ballot of members in the NHS in England and Northern Ireland. There was overwhelming support for industrial action to secure a better offer. The pay offer for NHS staff in England and Northern Ireland is an unconsolidated 1% pay award in 2014, restricted to staff not eligible for incremental progression and the same approach in 2015. This goes against the recommendation of the independent NHS Pay Review Body for a 1% consolidated pay rise for all staff.

Rehana Azam, GMB NHS National Officer, said "**The New Year will bring a regrettable escalation of the strike action in the NHS in this pay dispute. GMB has been left with no alternative as Jeremy Hunt, Secretary of State for Health, continues to act irresponsibly by sticking to an entrenched position of no meaningful talks with the health unions.**

This dispute is escalating. The consequences will mean a third wave of strikes across the NHS. GMB is consulting members on a two day strike on 29th & 30th January in the Ambulance Service.

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Further stoppages across the NHS are inevitable should Jeremy Hunt continue to refuse to hold discussions to settle the pay dispute. This is a dispute he created when he dismissed an independent pay review body's recommendation for NHS staff pay."

Steve Rice GMB Ambulance Chair said **"I have worked for the Ambulance Service for almost four decades and in this time I have worked under 17 Secretaries of State for Health. Never have I experienced staff morale at such a breaking point and that is why the GMB is calling an urgent GMB Ambulance meeting to discuss the details of a potential 2 day stoppage across the ambulance service. Escalation is always a last resort but in the absence of any real talks from government or employers we have nowhere else to go.**

Our A&E's are in a crisis and we took the responsible position by not striking over Christmas. This goodwill will not continue in the New Year. GMB members expect the current Secretary of State for Health to engage in meaningful talks to settle this dispute.

NHS staff are the backbone of the NHS and whilst the pay recommendation by the independent pay review body didn't go far enough it cannot be just dismissed by the Secretary State for Health."

GMB and other NHS unions issued a joint statement on 19th December that sets out a programme where NHS strikes will be escalated in the New Year.

This is the text of the joint statement:

"Health Trade Unions in England have announced a new round of Industrial action in 2015. There will be strikes in the NHS on 29th January and 25th February 2015 and action short of strike action over a longer period. This action is being taken over the Westminster Government's decision not to implement the recommendation of the independent Pay Review Body for the NHS to give all staff 1% for 2014/15 and the fact that the government has stopped the PRB making any recommendation for 2015/16

The Trade unions decided not to take strike action over Christmas and New Year period as this could have a serious impact on patient safety.

Christina McAnea, Chair of the joint NHS Trade Unions, said" NHS workers, as ever, are putting the safety of patients first by not taking industrial action over the Christmas and New Year periods when staffing levels are already stretched because of their concerns over patient safety. But the Government and NHS employers are showing a total disregard for patient safety by refusing to enter into any meaningful negotiations to try and resolve this dispute. We have no option but to escalate the industrial action by taking longer strikes. NHS workers are being treated worse than any other part of the public sector - they have had their pay frozen or held down for 5 years and many face serious hardship especially at Christmas."

Individual Trade unions will be announcing details of their strike action on those dates.

End

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