

10 December 2015

GMB WARNS THAT RECORD NUMBER OF PARAMEDICS QUITTING COULD TRIGGER AMBULANCE CRISIS

Unfilled vacancies and staff shortages means existing staff have to shoulder more responsibility and crews responding to 999 calls are staffed inadequately says GMB

The number of paramedics and other ambulance staff quitting the NHS has nearly doubled in four years – and thousands more plan to leave – according to a survey which included GMB members published today (Wednesday 9th December).

The findings are based on a survey of more than 3,000 paramedics by GMB, UNISON, and Unite. The three unions, who together represent over 20,000 ambulance staff, are warning that inadequate pay and poor working conditions are to blame for low morale among paramedics. This could trigger a crisis in the NHS unless the government acts, especially as one in every ten paramedic jobs remains vacant.

In evidence submitted to the NHS Pay Review Body, the unions report that 1,500 paramedics left the ambulance service last year (April 2014 to March 2015) compared with just 845 between 2010 and 2011. Almost three quarters (76 per cent) of remaining staff are also considering leaving, and more than nine in every ten (94 per cent) believe their pay does not adequately reflect their responsibilities.

The survey was carried out during November 2015 and based on responses from 3,220 paramedics.

A paramedic starting salary is £21,692 annually. They receive the full wage of £28,180 after seven years.

Many get a shift premium for working anti-social hours but this does not reflect their skills and responsibilities.

The average vacancy rate is 10% across the service, so employers are having to recruit from abroad.

GMB, UNISON, and Unite are calling on the government to fund a much-needed recruitment and retention bonus, and review salaries or risk a further staff exodus. They will be outlining this and other issues at an oral evidence session with the NHS Pay Review Body next week (15 December).

Rehana Azam, GMB Acting National Secretary, said: **“The vacancy rate across the ambulance service is reaching dangerous levels. This combined with staff**

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shortages means existing staff have to shoulder more responsibility and crews responding to 999 calls are staffed inadequately. The service needs proper investment and full recognition of skills if we are to retain staff."

UNISON Head of Health Christina McAnea said: "Paramedics are doing more than ever, and being asked to deal with a growing range of medical emergencies. But these skills and responsibilities haven't been recognised by employers or the government. Ambulance trusts say they haven't got the cash but the offer last January was from Jeremy Hunt and so trade unions will be calling on him to make sure the government keeps their side of the agreement.

"With the background of NHS cuts and recent threat of industrial action by junior doctors, it's essential the government doesn't mislead staff over their promises- or there could be industrial action in the ambulance service.

"The NHS will rely on its ambulance services as A&E units struggle to cope with winter pressures. If the government doesn't take action, then this crisis could turn into a catastrophe."

Unite head of health Barrie Brown said: "Jeremy Hunt has been ducking and diving while England's ambulance service has been allowed to sink into crisis.

"Hardworking ambulance staff and paramedics are voting with their feet and leaving the service. Their pay and conditions don't reflect the strenuous demands of the job. The London ambulance service is already in 'special measures' and spending thousands of pounds recruiting paramedics from as far away as Australia and New Zealand."

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