# Junior Doctors – your feedback needed

Last week, the first Junior Doctors’ strike took place, with many of our Psychiatry Junior Doctors taking part. The College has continuously called for a negotiated settlement to the dispute, and whilst we are pleased that next week’s has been called off, there still remains the possibility of a further strike on 10 February.

Importantly, I want to reiterate that both myself and the College respect the views and position of our junior doctors, and we are confident that our Consultants and SAS Doctors are ensuring that patient safety and care is being maintained during these strike days. I work closely with our Psychiatric Trainees' Committee, and know that they too feel this way. It was heartening to see on Twitter the pictures of our Consultants not only looking after patients and covering for our juniors on the ward, but also ensuring that our juniors were being looked after too. As the picture illustrates this extends as far as Chief Executives. I am not surprised though – how can we be kind and compassionate towards our patients if we are not the same to each other? If the press is to be believed (yes, I know what you are thinking but they do get it right sometimes) this was not a universal experience across the health service.

Terms and conditions are not part of the remit of any Royal College. But that does not mean that we have nothing to say. Indeed, there is a mood to make sure that our voice is heard more during this dispute, perhaps because we are all mindful of previous failings. For our part, we have been lobbying on the importance of using the negotiations to undertake a wider review of the factors concerning the ever increasing numbers of UK medical graduates who either defer or leave the UK medical profession to practice overseas, or simply opt out of medicine all together. This is not out of professional self-interest – far from it. It is an issue that affects patient care. There is now so much evidence that links the mental health of the workforce with the standards of care delivered that I find myself saying something I never thought a card carrying academic would say – we do not need more research on this. It is established beyond reasonable doubt that the highest standards of patient care are delivered by energetic, motivated and well rested doctors with a positive work life balance.

For the moment I am in regular contact with those in Government and senior levels of the NHS, and via our Psychiatric Trainees' Committee, the Secretary of State has asked to meet with some of our psychiatric junior doctors to discuss the wider issues surrounding the work of junior doctors, which we have agreed to do once the current contract dispute is settled. That these issues are important and predate the current dispute is clear – as David Cameron correctly pointed out in 2006, saying that doctors “join the NHS in their twenties, full of idealism and vocation. By their forties, far too many are demoralised. From idealism to demoralisation in half a career.” [1]

But for now we want to hear more from you. Both myself and the Psychiatric Trainees' Committee would greatly appreciate any feedback you could give on what wider issues you would like to see addressed. You can email careers@rcpsych.ac.uk. We would also be keen to hear about your experiences of the strike day, whether they be positive or negative, and to share any good practice that emerged as a result. There is not a single member of this College, whether they be junior or senior, who wishes to see harm come to patients, so please give us any feedback you can that we can then share.

But let’s hope it won’t be needed. We all want an agreement to be reached without the need for further industrial action. The RCPsych will continue to monitor the situation closely in the coming days, and ensure that our own actions reflect the needs of patients, members and fellows.

20th January 2016