

new BMA consultant deal on offer



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After months of deadlock between the Government and the British Medical Association (BMA), a new deal is on the table for consultants in England that could unlock the long-running dispute over doctors' pay.

The previous deadlocks escalated during September and October as consultants and juniors undertook coordinated strike action – the first time in the history of the NHS that both groups had been on strike together.

Although the two groups have similar concerns, their negotiations and demands remain separate. Junior doctor leaders have continued to push for 'full pay restoration', amounting to at least 35 per cent, which the Government has rejected as unrealistic.

Consultants, on the other hand, were asking for an above-inflation pay increase to begin to address pay erosion. They also sought meaningful reform of the independent body that makes pay recommendations to the Government, the Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body (DDRB).¹

The Government, through Health Secretary Steve Barclay, had for some months said there would be no more negotiation on pay after accepting the DDRB's recommended offer of six per cent for doctors earlier in the year. However, things shifted significantly during November.

At the CMF Junior Doctors' Conference on 10-12 November, strike action came up in the Q&A session with the main speaker, Rev Dr Matt Lillicrap. He very helpfully laid out some insightful pointers, such as:

- Industrial action has a strong Christian history in defending the legitimate rights of workers;
- These are matters of conscience, and we must be careful not to bind consciences in either direction. It's also entirely appropriate to reconsider our view and change our position in light of shifting situations;
- Can we articulate cogent Christian reasons for taking industrial action, and if so, can we express these with sufficient

distinctiveness in our words and actions when others may be following much more self-interested agendas?

This felt like a significant moment, and it led us to pray corporately in that Saturday evening conference session for the Lord to act.

Fascinatingly, on the following Monday morning, the sacking of Home Secretary Suella Braverman led to a wider cabinet reshuffle, resulting in a new Health & Social Care Secretary, Victoria Atkins. This fresh impetus and opportunity appears to have been crucial in the new deal being agreed between the Government and BMA negotiators less than two weeks later. What an incentive for us to keep on praying!

The new deal on offer is significant, with a further average uplift of 4.95 per cent and a simplification of pay banding that would mean junior consultant pay would increase more rapidly in future. Concessions made by the BMA negotiators include relinquishing some existing top-up payments and reducing current demands for premium pay rates for overtime shifts.²

The deal will now go to BMA consultant members, with a result expected in January. There is significant hope that progress here will help to unlock the more entrenched junior doctor pay demands too.

There is a long way to go still. Morale remains low amongst doctors, and there is a risk that this new offer may reignite pay disputes with nurses and other lower-paid healthcare workers.³ Meanwhile, waiting lists are higher than ever, with almost eight million waiting for routine treatment. The NHS continues to be under severe strain. Let's pray for the Lord to work and for all those in leadership positions to act with integrity and wisdom.

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Gaza and Israel



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The Hamas attack on largely undefended Israelis on 7 October 2023 has shocked the world. The murder of around 1,200 (Israelis – both Jew and Arab – and several foreigners)¹ and the kidnap of another 240² from southern Israel has rightly been almost universally condemned.³

The Israeli response has also shocked the world. In seeking to destroy Hamas' infrastructure through bombardment and ground assault of the Gaza Strip,⁴ the death toll among Palestinian civilians (given by the Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry as over 14,500 as of 21 November)⁵ has also raised anger and international protest.⁶

At the time of writing, the war has paused for prisoner exchanges and to allow much-needed food, water, fuel, and medicines to reach the beleaguered population of just over two million in the Gaza Strip. The infrastructure of several major hospitals in Gaza has been significantly damaged; health workers have died or are dealing with a lack of power, water, medicines, or other essential supplies to care for the injured, the sick, pregnant women, and their children.⁷

CMF stands in support of our fellow health workers who seek to save lives and work constructively for peace in both Gaza and Israel. In particular, we have been praying for the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza, run by the Anglican Church (Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem), and we have links and contacts with the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital, where cancer and palliative care services were being developed and supported with the input of some CMF members.⁸ Those services have all but stopped through a lack of resources. Many of the staff or their families have been injured or killed in the fighting and the bombardments.

Meanwhile, in Israel, the EMMS Nazareth Hospital continues to serve as a Christian hospital to a primarily Arab Israeli community. They face particular challenges at the moment, as heightened inter-community tensions bring hostility and fresh difficulties in relations with the wider community.

the Letby effect; a warning to NHS culture

full story at cmf.li/Letby



Bex Lawton, incoming CMF Head of Nurses and Midwives



Pippa Peppiatt, outgoing CMF Head of Nurses and Midwives



Chris Holcombe, CMF Associate for Healthcare Leadership

One of the most horrifying scandals ever to hit the NHS was that of Lucy Letby, a neonatal nurse who was found to have killed seven babies in her care and attempted to murder six more.

We cannot even begin to imagine the grief the families involved in this case must have gone through over these last eight years, and are still going through. The atrocities committed by Lucy Letby are chilling and deeply distressing. Our first thoughts should be for these families and to pray for them as they come to terms with this awful loss.

But we cannot ignore the impact this has had on the NHS. Firstly, the impact has been acutely felt by the nursing profession. That one of their own, someone tasked with the care of the most vulnerable in a profession that has some of the highest trust levels among the British public, should take the lives of those in their care so callously seems incomprehensible. As *The Guardian* said on 22 August, 'the nursing profession faces a long task to reassure families and patients that crimes and apparent failings will not be repeated'.¹

But it has also had an impact on those in management positions. Several paediatricians raised concerns about the abnormally large number of neonates dying or suffering adverse events whenever Letby was on the wards. The hospital management dismissed these concerns and even reprimanded the doctors for harassing a popular nurse, requiring them to apologise to Letby.²

CMF has convened a series of prayer meetings to bring together members with links to the region, including the three hospitals named above. Please continue to pray with us for peace, for aid to reach those most in need, and above all, impossible as it now seems, for reconciliation and healing between the communities in Israel, Gaza, the West Bank and the wider world, sundered by the war and the history of this region.

If you want to support the work of Nazareth Hospital or Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in

Patient safety was not put first, nor was the dogged pursuit of the truth. Reputational concerns and a desire not to upset the feelings of the individual involved seem to have taken priority. There are good whistle-blowing policies and governance structures. But these policies 'sit on a shelf'. At the same time, there is enormous pressure from above that gives a very different message – 'do not complain, do not cause a scandal, meet the targets, do everything – regardless of resource – while also delivering this year's cost savings'. Even though this is patently impossible.

There is an unequal fight between a good, well-written policy and the daily pressure, whose message is in many ways the opposite. The government, NHS England, CEOs, and Trust Boards don't always want to hear the truth.

The government's primary concerns are re-election and avoiding & limiting reputational damage. This culture is cascaded down through the system, not least through Trust CEOs, whose jobs are on the line if they are deemed responsible for reputational damage and the ensuing political fallout. With an average tenure of only three years for an NHS CEO, this is a well-grounded fear!

There is often no honest conversation. The consequences are likely to be severe for all involved. Cheshire Constabulary have opened a corporate manslaughter investigation against the Countess of Chester Hospital's senior leadership team.³ And a public enquiry has just begun into the whole case.⁴ Many of those involved may face

criminal proceedings, and every decision will be scrutinised. Rightly so, but also with long-term consequences that may only push the problems down on managers and ward staff, and avoid the hard questions about NHS and political cultures that have contributed to Letby's crimes going unheeded for too long.

In today's NHS, true honesty is not always a welcome message. It has not ended well for most whistle-blowers in the NHS, in the same way as it did not end well for many of the prophets of the Old Testament. Yet God did, and still does, call us to champion the truth and to speak up for the voiceless, as he called Jeremiah to speak to King Zedekiah, or Nathan to King David, or Moses to Pharaoh.

If you have been affected by the issues raised by the Lucy Letby case or find yourself struggling with whistle-blowing issues in your workplace, please get in touch with our Pastoral Care Team, who are there to offer a listening ear, prayer, and, where appropriate, onward referral to other services.

cmf.li/CMFPastoral •

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Gaza City, you can get more details on the following websites:

- Nazareth Hospital Trust – nazarethtrust.org

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8. *Ibid*

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