

Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Rt Hon Liz Truss MP
Conservative Party Leadership Candidates

01 August 2022

Dear Mr Sunak, Ms Truss,

The past two years have seen the medical profession come together in what were previously unimaginable circumstances to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact on what was an already overstretched and underfunded healthcare service has been immense. In England we face unprecedented waiting lists of 6.6m people, a huge backlog of care and record numbers of GP appointments being delivered by the equivalent of 1,806 fewer full time fully qualified GPs than we had in 2015. Meanwhile, COVID-19 cases and hospitalisations once again rise.

At the same time, the NHS is facing ‘the greatest workforce crisis in its history’, as highlighted by the Health and Social Care Committee’s damning workforce report. Our doctors are burnt out, demoralised and have been undervalued by successive Governments that have failed to deliver the solutions necessary to address the scale of the situation. There seems to be little understanding of the knock-on impacts of poor health outcomes on the country’s economy. To deliver the best health outcomes and quality of patient care, you need a safely staffed, motivated workforce. We are at a critical crossroad for the NHS. It is vital that the next Prime Minister recognises the severity of the situation and takes urgent action to address it.

The UK Government’s recent pay announcement compounds more than a decade’s worth of sub-inflation pay awards and is simply another real-terms pay cut for doctors in both secondary and primary care, some of whom have seen their take-home pay reduce by more than a third since 2008. GP contractors, Junior and SAS doctors are being punished again for agreeing a multiyear pay deal before the pandemic – entirely disregarding their efforts during the COVID-19 response, and the soaring rates of inflation. These agreements were made in good faith and previously brought junior doctors in England out of dispute with the Government. However, the UK Government has failed to act in good faith by ignoring terms of the agreement that allow enhancements for pay to be made in exceptional circumstances – there is no greater exceptional circumstance than a global pandemic. The DDRB recognised these exceptional circumstances and felt that an uplift should have been applied, but the Government has chosen to ignore this. The Government has not even been able to clarify how the sub-inflationary offer would apply to SAS doctors across multiple contracts despite repeated requests from the BMA. GP partners are being left to once again find the money for uplifts for their practice teams’ salaries with no additional funding made available to them, this is against a backdrop of soaring inflation and utility costs that partners are having to front without any support

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from this Government – this is quite frankly unacceptable and unsustainable, practices will fold. Doctors will only put up with so much and they now feel utterly taken for granted.

Consistent pay erosion, exacerbated by this year's dismal pay award, has set the Government on a collision course with the profession. The BMA has already been clear that a refusal to commit to pay restoration by the end of the year leaves junior doctors with no option but to press ahead with preparations for industrial action. I ask you to revisit the Government's decision as soon as possible and commit to pay restoration for all doctors immediately please in order to avoid a further dispute with the profession.

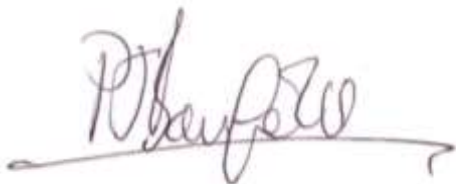
If we are to have any chance of tackling the care backlog in both primary and secondary care, we must stem the tide of senior doctors leaving the NHS due to punitive pension taxation rules. The current situation, highlighted by Health and Social Care Select Committee who described the situation as a "national scandal", is leading to a huge number of senior doctors being driven to reduce their working commitments or leave the NHS completely.

We are asking for a commitment from the future Prime Minister to solve the pension taxation crisis once and for all within this tax year, and to keep our much needed doctors working in the NHS. In the short-term Government must address the urgent issues caused by inflation, resulting in doctors incurring huge tax bills on non-existent 'pseudogrowth', by amending the Finance Act or introducing an NHS annual allowance compensation scheme. In the longer term introducing a tax unregistered scheme for higher earners in the NHS, similar to that granted to the judiciary, would provide a creditable, fair and affordable solution that would remove the barriers currently limiting the amount of care doctors can provide for their patients.

The current Prime Minister clapped NHS staff and heaped sadly empty words of praise on them. The NHS deserves better than that. Only by committing to pay restoration, addressing the punitive pension taxation rules and developing a credible workforce plan for the NHS, will you demonstrate your commitment to the health service, the medical workforce and the wider public.

Your potential Government must recognise the true cost of medical expertise. I hope this opportunity will not be missed and I look forward to meeting with you to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Phil Banfield', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Professor Phil Banfield
Chair, BMA Council