



Department
of Health

*From the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health*

*Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS*

Mb-sofs@dh.gsi.gov.uk

POC_1030682

Dr Mark Porter
BMA Council Chair
BMA House
Tavistock Square
London
WC1H 9JP

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Dear Mark,

It was good to speak on the phone this afternoon, and I remain willing to meet and continue our discussions at any time.

However, I must address once again for the record one of the assertions in your recent letter. I'm afraid that your contention that the unresolved issue in negotiations over the contract was not weekend pay is contradicted by the evidence.

On February 1st the highly respected Chief Executive of the Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust, Sir David Dalton who led negotiations with your team wrote to as follows: "The substantive areas where we have not been able to reach agreement are about pay, and the most significant of these is pay linked to unsocial hours. The key area of difference between the parties remains payment for unsocial hours in the evenings and on Saturday... the BMA restated that they would not negotiate on this issue - and would not concede to any plain time working on Saturdays." I understand that a related issue of overtime payments for unsocial hours working, non-residential on-call allowance rates, also proved difficult to resolve. Sir David Dalton told me: "An improved final offer of a maximum 10% rate has been made - but has not been accepted by the BMA who are seeking a 20% rate, some two and a half times more than any other employed doctors receive."



This was implicitly supported by the Chair of the JDC on two occasions. Firstly when he wrote to members on Christmas Eve saying 'whilst good ground has been made, there are still a couple of areas of absolute disagreement' referring to non-residential on-call rates and Saturday pay. Secondly in emails leaked to the HSJ last week which suggest the only way forward in terms of a negotiated solution would be for the BMA to agree to discuss Saturday pay. If there had been other stumbling blocks to a negotiated settlement, the JDC Chair would surely have referenced them in this context.

As you know, whilst the Government made 3 significant concessions on the issue of Saturday pay over several months the BMA made zero attempt to compromise. It is therefore totally unreasonable, having shown unwillingness to compromise on the only substantive issue left to resolve between our two sides, to ask the Government to scrap the introduction of the new contract. Regrettably we were left with no choice but to proceed with introducing new contracts from August which we need to do in order to provide the NHS with certainty for the coming year.

Of course, I understand that there are wider issues which have created discontent amongst junior doctors over many years, including the way training currently works with long commutes and placements potentially far away from spouses, professional fees, and more recently, the funding and workforce requirements for seven day services, but these are all outside the remit of the negotiations we had on new employment contracts, and require us to work together at a national level to find solutions. My offer of talks to do so still stands.

JEREMY HUNT