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Further industrial action announced as RCN reject pay deal

20 April 2023

We previously brought you news that the government and Agenda for Change unions had reached a deal in respect of the pay dispute and that members were now voting on whether to accept the deal. However, following consultation with members, the news is not as good as many healthcare employers would have hoped. Although Unison members have voted to accept the deal, 54% of RCN members voted to reject it.

Following the vote, the RCN announced a further 48-hour strike by nurses from 8 p.m. on 30 April to 8 p.m. on 2 May. However, crucially for the first time in the current dispute, no cover will be provided for some critical care services including emergency departments, intensive care and cancer care. This has led to Steve Barclay, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, writing to the RCN to invite them to a meeting to discuss how they can avoid the “escalatory action”. Further, the RCN are likely to re-ballot for further action which could last another six months.

Other unions including Unite, who did not recommend the pay deal to its members, and the GMB are still awaiting the results of their ballots which are due to close next week. However, Unite have announced that ambulance workers across seven trusts will also take further action with staff going out on strike on 1 and 2 May.

Although it is too early to say whether other union members will also reject the deal, further action by RCN and Unite together with potential further strikes by junior doctors and the possibility of co-ordinated action, will be a further source of worry for healthcare employers. Therefore, for the time being at least employers will need to continue to put in place contingency plans to deal with the continued action, which still shows no sign of abating.

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