

NEWS

Strike: 'This is a systematic attack on us'

First doctors' walkout for 40 years

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Junior doctors walked out of hospitals in Camden and Haringey on Tuesday after the British Medical Association called for nationwide industrial action.

Doctors at the Royal Free and Whittington hospitals have said they were left with no choice after they felt "attacked" and "vilified" by the government over contract negotiations.

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt described the action as "wholly unnecessary" but Whittington and UCLH consultant Simon Lewis said the strikes are a "fight for the future of the NHS".

Mr Lewis said: "If the junior doctors give in, this will equate to a *carte blanche* for Mr Hunt and Mr Cameron to push through further changes in an attempt to move towards the destruction of the NHS as we have known it.

"The NHS should be cherished and the running of it should be removed from the clumsy hands of thick-skinned politicians."

The Royal Free cancelled 31 operations and 14 clinics due to the strikes which began at 8am and lasted 24 hours.

The hospital released a statement saying: "Patients whose treatment is affected will be contacted by telephone and offered new dates. We

would like to apologise for any inconvenience this may cause."

The Whittington cancelled 21 operations and 10 clinics.

Chairman of the Whittington Trust Board, Simon Pleydell, said: "It is extremely regrettable that we have got here, but it is the right of staff to strike and, as an organisation, we support that."

Members of the Camden Keep Our NHS Public organisation joined protesters outside the hospitals in a show of support.

Chair of Camden KONP, Candy Udwin, believes the government proposals will mean junior doctors will be under pressure to work longer hours.

She said: "This will affect patient safety.

"An extremely tired doctor cannot possibly stay on top of the very difficult job of looking after hospital patients.

"We don't want our doctors to be so tired they can't function properly."

Mr Hunt suggested the BMA is not willing to negotiate on the issue.

He said: "We are very happy to work with the BMA but they listened to our proposals for less than an hour and then walked out of talks.

"The door is open. I think these are things we can sort out by talking, not by risking patient safety.

"In the end we all have the shared vision to make the NHS the safest and highest quality in the world."