

Barclay warns over nurses' strike impact on emergency services and cancer care

The [Health Secretary](#) has warned fresh nurses' strikes would have a "deeply concerning" impact on emergency services and cancer care.

Steve Barclay has called on The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) to accept the Government's pay offer so the [NHS](#) can "get back to focusing on patients".

The RCN announced on Friday its members will walk out for 48 hours from 8pm on April 30 after rejecting the Government's pay offer.

NHS nurses in emergency departments, intensive care and cancer wards will take industrial action for the first time.

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In an opinion piece for [The Sun](#), Mr Barclay said: "Patient safety is my first priority as Health and Social Care [Secretary](#). Industrial action means the safety of patients is put at risk.

"Cancelled operations, missed appointments, and treatments

postponed – none of this is good for the NHS or patients.”

The Health Secretary described the deal he reached with members of [Unison](#), the largest NHS union, as “fair and reasonable”, and added he was waiting to hear back from the remaining NHS unions.

On Friday, Unison’s NHS members accepted the NHS pay offer of a 5% pay rise this year and a cash payment for last year.

Mr Barclay added physiotherapists, paramedics and midwives will receive more than £5,100 across last year and this year, including a £2,000 bonus by the summer.

He added: “The prospect of more upheaval and the impact this would have on key services, including emergency and cancer care, is deeply concerning – both for health leaders and patients.

“We have made it out of a tough winter, and thanks to the efforts of hardworking NHS staff, there has been significant progress in cutting the backlogs and reducing waits for treatment.

“With the support of union members in accepting this pay offer we can continue to improve services and deliver for patients – a priority I know we all share.”

However, 54% of RCN members voted to reject the deal. The turnout among RCN members employed on NHS Agenda for Change contracts in England was 61%.

Nick Hulme, chief executive of Ipswich and Colchester hospitals, told Radio 4 that fresh nurses strikes will “significantly increase the risk to patients”.

He said: “If there is a delay to cancer care, some delays won’t cause significant effects, but there are many people who have been waiting far too long for care and this will only

exacerbate that risk.”

Mr Hulme added strike action being coordinated by doctors and nurses could “cause a risk I can’t quite comprehend”.

Asked whether the RCN would consider coordinating industrial action with junior doctors, the union’s director for England Patricia Marquis told BBC’s Newsnight: “That is something that will have to be considered if not least because we are all in the same space.”

The RCN announcement comes as around 47,000 junior doctors finished their 96-hour strike in a separate dispute over pay at 7am on Saturday.

Sir Julian Hartley, chief executive of NHS Providers, said the prospect of another nurses’ strike is “extremely worrying”.

RCN general secretary Pat Cullen has written to Mr Barclay to seek urgent re-opening of talks with the Government.

She said: “What has been offered to date is simply not enough. The Government needs to increase what has already been offered and we will be highly critical of any move to reduce it.

“After a historic vote to strike, our members expect a historic pay award.”