

Joint Statement from the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and the BMA

Friday 11th May 2007

The current crisis around applications to speciality training requires the profession to unite in finding a better way forward. The decision that the Academy and the BMA would be part of the Review Group was both pragmatic and responsible. Some of you may have been urged to boycott the MTAS interview process. We understand the deep concerns that underlie such suggestions but are clear that they are misjudged and not the right way forward at this critical time. We agree that correction and improvement are necessary, for doctors and for patients, but they should be achieved through continued responsible argument and vigorous negotiation, not by action which would harm our junior colleagues.

The Review Group chaired by Professor Neil Douglas considered the possibility of withdrawing entirely from MTAS. This, it concluded, was simply not a credible option. It would be impossible to place the best candidates in posts and fulfil the needs of patients and the service by August, by reverting to the old system of recruitment. We accept that the Review Group's recommendations for a pragmatic solution, while falling short of the wishes expressed by some doctors, does offer the best available solution at this time. The Review Group's recommendations will, we hope, bring to an end some of the dreadful uncertainty for junior doctors, while ensuring that the enormous amount of work undertaken by consultants and juniors in the interview process to date, is not wasted.

Some inaccurate information about the work of the review group has been circulated. The promulgation of myths builds on the uncertainty and fears of junior doctors and does little to help positive progress. Currently we must correct a number of points:

- The President of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, far from dissociating himself from the Review Group remains a full member of the Review Body. During his current absence abroad he has nominated a deputy from his College to continue representation of surgeons on the Review Group.
- Both the BMA Junior Doctors Committee and the Academy Trainee Doctors' Group are represented on the Review Group.
- Single interviews are not what is being offered. It is all the interviews offered at shortlisting plus each candidate's first preference interview if not already offered.
- Most trainees are likely to have more than one interview.
- There is no system of one strike and you're out (see the preceding point). In addition, round 2 will offer a significant number of training posts.
- In the devolved nations, all applicants will be interviewed for all their choices. This approach was considered by the review group for England but ruled out in the end as it was not considered practical, given the huge number of interviews that would be needed.

It is vital that the profession takes the lead on a way out of this crisis, and on all future issues related to the future management and development of training.

Carol Black, Chairman, Academy of Medical Royal Colleges
James Johnson, Chairman, Council, British Medical Association

NB: The BMA advises consultants that a withdrawal from interviewing may constitute a breach of their employment contracts and, if so, industrial action. Such action has not been balloted for, is not directed at consultants' employers, has not been approved by the BMA

and would be unlawful. Doctors involved in such action could expose themselves to legal risks including dismissal (without protection from unfair dismissal) and/or damages for breach of contract. The BMA regards it as important that consultants are fully aware of the possible personal consequences of any decision to withdraw from interviews and would strongly advise consultants not to take this course of action.

Consultants who have any concerns should seek professional advice from askBMA on 0870 6060 828. Further information is also available on the BMA website at <http://www.bma.org.uk/ap.nsf/Content/MTASguidance140307>