

Dr Helen Fidler (NHS Consultant)

I have been a consultant for 18 years at Lewisham. When the government tried to impose a new contract on my junior staff, my future colleagues, I was very interested to know what was involved. I also knew what they were doing with the consultant contract. When you look at the new junior contract, it's an absolute disaster.

First of all, it's not safe. It's not safe for my patients to have junior staff as tired as I was as a junior. We remember what it was like when there were very few safeguards on out-of-hours working. I would get in on a Friday morning and would be working until Monday afternoon. If you were the patient I saw that Monday afternoon, you would not get the high standard of care that I want my patients to have.

It was not safe for the juniors working these shifts. They would crash their cars driving home, they would drink too much alcohol, they would divorce, they wouldn't have a family life, some would commit suicide – it was dreadful.

It's improved, it's better now. We do not want to go back to that. The new contract does not have safeguards to prevent that and the government knows that.

It will have a terrible effect on treatment in those areas that are already having problems recruiting. So out-of-hours services like emergency departments which are very much in the news at the moment will be in even more dire straits. Some of our juniors will just leave. There has been an 11% drop in medical school applications in the last year.

As a consultant we pick up the pieces. There comes a point when we can't cover gaps in the service. Then it's the patients that suffer and I'm not prepared to tolerate that without making a fuss.

It's also simply not fair. The BMA and the consultants can see what's happening. It's not about how much the juniors are being paid. We need decent emergency care at the weekend; we do not need unaffordable, unnecessary and unwanted elective work at weekends.