

BMA calls for minimum 1% increase in doctors' pay for 2013-14

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All doctors, including general practitioners, should be awarded at least a 1% pay rise next year to account for years of pay freezes and below inflation pay increases, the BMA has said.

The government has instructed the independent Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration (DDRB) to consider awarding doctors a pay rise of 1% for 2013-14, but has suggested that the body does not need to make any recommendations on the gross contract uplift for general practitioners.

Earlier this week, NHS Employers called for the current public sector pay freeze to be extended for a further year for all NHS staff, arguing that the NHS could not afford any pay uplift without cutting jobs and compromising patient care.¹

In its annual submission of evidence to the DDRB, the BMA says that it fully recognises the need for pay restraint in the current economic climate.

But it argues that pay levels for all doctors have been seriously eroded as a result of pay caps, rising inflation, and increased pension contributions, substantially widening the income gap between medicine and other comparable professions.

"In recent years, doctors have accepted that they need to play a part in dealing with the economic downturn but successive, ongoing pay freezes are now beginning to take their toll with morale plummeting across all groups of doctors across the NHS," said Mark Porter, chair of the BMA Council.

Consultant pay has fallen back to 2003 levels, he said, while GPs are "being squeezed by a financial straitjacket of falling pay and rising staff costs.

"It is vital that the DDRB recognises that we need a fair approach to pay in the years ahead that recognises the enormous pressure that doctors are operating under," he said.

The submission makes clear that the BMA "is especially concerned about the singling out of GP contractors . . . We believe that GPs should expect to be treated fairly and in line with other doctors in the NHS."

The government should not have intervened in the pay review process in this way, the union says, and the DDRB should be able to reach its own conclusions around the gross uplift necessary to achieve a 1% net increase in GP pay.

Although there has been some uplift in GP funding, it adds, this has only partially offset rising expenses, resulting in a real net pay cut for GPs.

In addition the BMA calls for specific allowances for junior doctors to cover rising travel expenses, reduced study budgets, and increased registration and training fees.

And it urges the DDRB to take into consideration the increased pension contributions doctors are making.

"The BMA regards therefore the government's proposal for a one per cent uplift as a minimum on this occasion and asks that any uplift be applied equally to the net incomes of all doctors," it concludes.

In response to the BMA's evidence, Dean Royles, who heads up NHS Employers, said: "We know this is a tough message, but NHS organisations cannot afford an unnecessary increase in doctors' pay rates next year without it impacting on patient care and putting jobs at risk."

He added: "The simple fact is that, despite a headline pay 'freeze', the pay of most doctors continues to increase as they progress up the pay levels each year. The overall pay bill has increased and this is not sustainable."

- The BMA's full submission to the DDRB is available online at: <http://bma.org.uk/working-for-change/negotiating-for-the-profession/pay-negotiations>.

1 White C. NHS Employers recommend extending doctors' pay freeze. *BMJ Careers*, 09 Oct 2012. <http://careers.bmj.com/careers/advice/view-article.html?id=20009183>.

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