



VIEWS & REVIEWS

ACUTE PERSPECTIVE

David Oliver: I've nothing against golf

As a kid in Manchester I'd hack my way around municipal short courses in public parks with rented clubs. And I enjoy watching the Open and the Masters on TV. But that's the closest I've got to golf club membership.

Non-medical media watchers in the United Kingdom might have me pegged as "below par" here. Surely all doctors have a membership card in our wallet and kit in the car, ready to tee off at a moment's notice with a group of well heeled colleagues? And what better time, surely, than when at the public's expense—perhaps when we're on call or meant to be in clinic on a Friday afternoon? Shameful.

A recent *Times* feature on emergency readmissions to hospital had Patient Concern's Roger Goss opining that these were due to doctors working "on the golf course with their mobile phones."¹ Cristina Odone said in the *Telegraph*, "Doctors should get off the golf course and onto the wards,"² and the vitriolic online responses evinced equally uninformed resentment.

These examples symbolise the myths and clichés in the narrative surrounding the current stand-off between the Department of Health and the BMA over contract changes and seven day working. Golf club membership in England is 83% male and only 3% non-white.³ It's seen as shorthand for wealth and exclusivity, conservative with a small and a large C. This is exemplified by the BBC's "voice of golf," Peter Alliss, and his reactionary on-air gaffes.⁴ Also, it's often said that doctors are "naturally conservative."

Yet the General Medical Council census showed that half of UK doctors are women and that only half are white.⁵ And openly anti-Conservative campaigns against the growing marketisation of the NHS, including those from the BMA itself, indicate that many doctors are hardly of the political right.⁶

When I'm in the hospital on a weekend I work pretty much flat out for 12 hours. There'd be some slow play if I tried to see

30-40 new acute patients from a golf course. It's the same for most doctors, junior or senior, in many acute specialties. But this didn't stop the health secretary, Jeremy Hunt, saying that we had a "nine to five weekday culture" and had "lost a sense of vocation."⁷

I've recently asked more than 100 doctor colleagues whether they play golf, and fewer than 1 in 20 said yes. Popular debates about doctors' terms and conditions should be based on the realities of the modern medical workforce, our values, and our work patterns—and not on fantasy.

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Follow David on Twitter, @mancunianmedic

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