CAREERS

New consultant contract needs more flexibility for young doctors, senior leader says

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The BMJ

The new consultants' contract should include new flexibilities to boost morale and retention of young doctors in England, including options for sabbaticals and extra annual leave for those who work unsociable hours, a senior medical leader has argued.

Clifford Mann, national clinical adviser to NHS England's Accident and Emergency Improvement Plan and former president of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, said that the proposed contract should be used as opportunity to re-engage demotivated staff. This would signal that national leaders had listened to the grievances underlying last year's junior doctors' dispute, he said.

"Why don't we give the profession the signals within the contract that people are taking the issues we've been talking about seriously?" he asked at a meeting hosted by *The BMJ* at the Nuffield Trust's Health Policy Summit on 2 March. The meeting focused on how the NHS could become a "millennial friendly" employer.

The BMA has been in discussions with the government about a new consultant contract since 2013, and negotiations continue.

Mann said that numerous other countries, including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and even Wales, had provisions in doctors' contracts to enable them to take sabbaticals or long

service study leave. Adopting a similar approach in England would allow doctors to bring new approaches back to their department, he said. "It re-energises the individual, re-energises your department. It is what high performing companies do for their senior staff all the time. So why don't we do it?"

Mann also argued that having a single contract for all consultants that offered a pro rata uplift to their annual leave depending on how many extra evenings, nights, and weekends they worked would help to improve their work-life balance. He said, "This would be extremely attractive to younger consultants and to consultants married to each other with a young family. You've got to try to look after [your children] through the six or seven weeks of the summer holiday. If one or both of those parties is getting extra annual leave to make that easier, that improves their family life and reduces the pressures and reduces the cost.

"A maximum of three weeks could be accrued, [but] that way [the employer] has got to find extra cover for three weeks of the year, not 52 weeks of the year."

He added, "My plea would be that if you can't put anything in the new consultant contract—which is what the current generation of trainees will be on within five years—then you will be sending a very negative message that you have failed to listen to the concerns around this table and the wider NHS staff groups, and that would be a massive opportunity missed."