



VIEWS AND REVIEWS

THE BOTTOM LINE

Partha Kar: The NHS really isn't a bad place to work

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The NHS always polarises opinion, and many who work there are constantly divided over whether we should highlight its faults or champion it as a great place to work. If we dwell on its faults we can seem like dour shroud wavers, set on deterring the next generation from following in our footsteps. But, if we champion it unreservedly, we risk coming across as blindly optimistic evangelists.

I interact with enough junior doctors to know that they're as dedicated to working hard and helping people as the doctors I trained with. It's not their fault if today's working hours are different and training shorter. Do today's juniors moan more than their predecessors? Well, it's more public now because of social media: on Twitter you can immediately offload your angst and frustration, which many people see as moaning. When I was in training two decades ago, when we complained about the system we did so in a pub, among friends. If we'd had social media would we have been any different from today's junior doctors? Probably not.

Being a registrar was tough—never more so than when acting as medical registrar on call. Consultant coverage was rare, referrals were rubbish, we sometimes lost our cool, and the pay wasn't great (anyone remember those additional duty hours)? But I suspect that we all knew where we were heading: we worked our time, the pay improved, and, in general, we had fun. The pressure of the working environment and the long working hours created a sort of trench mentality, and the concept of a

team was ingrained. Does it still exist? A lot of people now would suggest this mentality to be a rarity rather than the norm.

Then I became a consultant, and what can I say? Things get better. I do a job I love (the one I wanted to do), and I have amazing colleagues. The frustration you hear about from colleagues isn't necessarily the work itself but the lack of basic things such as tea and coffee or team lunches—compounded in no small measure by national bodies pontificating about which yoga mats to buy, while the basics aren't dealt with. "How do you make your workplace better?" isn't something to be discussed at a conference: it's right in front of us, if we choose to look.

I know that some will disagree and tell you how rubbish life can be as an NHS doctor. But, having worked in other health systems, I'd say no, it's not rubbish. It's not Disneyland, but neither is it Mordor. There are ups and downs and frustrations, but, in the main, it isn't bad. To anyone unsure of a future in medicine or the NHS, I'd say this: don't leave. You'd miss out on the best part of the career you've worked so hard to build.

Competing interests: I am associate national clinical director for diabetes with NHS England.

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