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Doctors' strike to hit Epsom Hospital

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Hospitals across South West London are bracing for disruption this week as resident doctors begin a five-day strike on Friday, 25 July. The week-long strike action by British Medical Association (BMA) members comes as the NHS faces one of its busiest summers in recent years, with a spike in emergency admissions driven by heatwaves and increasingly complex patient needs. Resident doctors – those who have completed their initial medical degree and are now in postgraduate training or gaining experience in non-training positions – were awarded an average 5.4% pay rise for this financial year, following a 22% increase over the previous two years. However, the BMA says wages are still around 20% lower in real terms than in 2008 and has committed to strike action in demand of "pay restoration."

The walkout will affect hospitals across England, including St George's, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group (GESH). GESH medical professionals are warning the public to expect delays and to take preventative steps to avoid overwhelming already stretched services. "While we're doing everything we can to prepare, these strikes will cause huge disruption," warned Dr Richard Jennings, Chief Medical Officer for GESH. "Patients coming to an emergency department when it's not an emergency will be waiting longer, or even directed to another service," he added. Common reasons for hospital admissions during the heatwave have included respiratory issues, chest pain, shortness of breath and falls. Over 800 more people have attended emergency departments this summer compared to the same period last year. Between 1 June and 14 July, emergency department attendances at GESH rose to 37,167 – up from 36,328 in 2024 and 35,460 in 2023.

To maintain emergency services, consultants and other staff will be redeployed from routine care to cover A&E, operating theatres and hospital wards, resulting in many planned procedures being cancelled or delayed. Patients and staff at St Helier have already faced significant disruption this year, partly due to the hospital's ageing infrastructure. In January, a roof collapse in the phlebotomy unit forced the last-minute cancellation of several urgent blood tests. Despite the strike action, patients are urged to attend appointments unless contacted otherwise, and to continue seeking help in emergencies. The NHS is also asking the public to consider other services first, such as NHS 111 online, pharmacies or GPs, which are unaffected by the strike. "We have a difficult week coming up and we need members of the public to help us – whether that's using the most appropriate service for their health need or taking steps to prevent becoming unwell," Dr Jennings said.

Health Secretary Wes Streeting has criticised the strike, calling it "completely unjustified" and showing "complete disdain" for patients. However, BMA resident doctors committee co-chairs Dr Melissa Ryan and Dr Ross Nieuwoudt said they had tried to compromise with the government during talks, and that strike action was a last resort. They said: "We have always said that no doctor wants to strike, and all it would take to avoid it is a credible path to pay restoration offered by the government. We came to talks in good faith, keen to explore real solutions to the problems facing resident doctors today. Unfortunately, we did not receive an offer that would meet the scale of those challenges. While we were happy to discuss non-pay issues that affect doctors' finances, we have always been upfront that this is at its core a pay dispute."

The strike will run from 7am on Friday 25 July, until 7am on Wednesday 30 July.

Harrison Galliven – LDRS

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