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Surrey doctors to go on strike?

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Royal Surrey hospital trust bosses are beginning to plan for three days of junior doctor strikes which could have a “significant impact” on services. A national ballot is currently taking place of members of the BMA Junior Doctors union, which closes on February 20.

If members vote for action, it could mean a possible 72-hour strike taking place in March, a board meeting heard on Thursday (January 26). As yet the trust, which runs Guildford’s Royal Surrey County Hospital as well as the Haslemere hospital, has not been directly impacted by its staff striking, though ambulance strikes in December saw the hospital put measures in place.

Meeting documents said the junior doctors’ strike was more likely than others to meet the 50 per cent threshold needed for members to strike because a national ballot was being held. According to the BMA website, junior doctors have seen their pay cut by more than 25% to their salaries since 2008/09.

Bill Jewsbury, the trust’s medical director, said the three-day strike, which he thought “probably would” go ahead, would have a “significant impact” on various parts of running the trust. The meeting heard that other, more senior doctors, would need to “step down” into the roles, along with non-union members.

Dr Jewsbury added: “That then has an impact beyond that 72 hours because we then have to rest those people.
“What you’re looking at is a much longer period of disruption than just your three days’ of strike.”

According to the documents, a review carried out of the day of ambulance workers’ striking in December had identified one incident that was being investigated of the strike having an impact on patient care. The meeting also heard that the possible junior doctors’ strike would impact on its target to clear the backlog of people waiting more than 78 weeks, a year and a half, for treatment by the end of March, in line with national guidance.

Getting rid of all the people on the waiting list was described in documents as “the biggest operational challenge affecting the trust”, with a peak of 207 patients in the category at the beginning of October, falling to 161 at the end of November and to 155 in the first week in December.

Matt Jarratt, chief operating officer, told the meeting: “That is going to be a major challenge was going forward.”

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