



November 2006

Part II Fellowship Examination in Administrative Medicine

Case Study 2

The junior doctors are on day 4 of a 5 day territory wide strike and are threatening to give 14 day notice for a further strike. The strike is about working conditions, rostering and pay. There is mixed support for the strike amongst the juniors but their union has taken a very hard line approach.

Senior doctors have been covering the wards and all elective work has been cancelled. While they are coping with the emergency work they are tired and have a serious feeling of unease at any prospect of further strike action. In four of the six surgical wards all the junior surgical doctors have turned up to work and there is a strong rumour that the senior staff in these units have applied coercion and even threatened the career prospects of those staff who are striking.

There has been marked over expenditure of the health budget and there is absolutely no funding available to meet any demands for additional labour costs. The Health Secretary is said to be very unhappy that the strike has already lasted so long and has caused significant disruption of services. The Secretary holds the hospital administration responsible for all aspects of medical human resource management and has demanded resolution without any fiscal compromise. The press have eagerly sensationalized the entire conflict and there are daily front page items describing patient hardships as a result of the strikes.

You are the Chief Executive of the organisation responsible for public hospital services, and have been asked to present on prime time radio show this evening in a debate against the junior doctors union representative on "It is unethical for doctors to strike!"

Outline the main points of your debate mindful that your comments will possibly influence public support, colleague backing, union antagonism, and political sensitivities. Your opposition is of course aware of the rumours regarding senior doctors coercion and threats to the junior staff.

You also have a meeting tomorrow at 10 am with the Health Secretary.

Outline the strategy you intend to follow to assist in bringing about a resolution of the strike. Also put forward proposals for the future to minimize the annual recurrence of this problem.

2006 Case Study 2 Key points

For Examiner

There are two aspects to the question.

The first deals with Ethical Issues and the philosophy surrounding strike action in the health care environment. A debate would raise the ethical notions of the doctor's duty of care embracing beneficence, non-malevolence, justice and integrity. An opposing view would stress that exhaustive rostering and poor working conditions threaten patient safety and so drastic measures such as striking are in circumstances warranted to bring about improvement in patient care.

The second part deals with strategic management in the context of human resource management issues relating to doctors.

The candidate needs to identify all the stakeholders; the junior doctors, their union representatives, the senior doctors, the medical administration staff, the patients, the politicians, and the press and all interested bodies. An understanding of the impact of the strike on all these stakeholders needs to be clearly described.

There needs to be an appreciation of the legal aspects of strike action within the public service and an obvious readiness to obtain legal opinion and have at least some familiarity with legal issues surrounding human resource management issues and withholding services.

Mention should be made of the financial implications of striking action and also the impact of any settlements especially in an environment of scarce resources.