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The NHS in Portugal guarantees the right of citizens to universal health care, regardless of social status, economic situation, or geographic location. Unfortunately, NHS is now at risk due to scant investment made by successive governments in the public health service and its professionals.

Compared to the pre-pandemic period, health care delivery to the population failed furthermore. In primary health care, citizens without a family doctor (GP) have increased to 1.6M (16% of the population). Emergency Rooms of Obstetrics and Gynaecology services, have been shut down daily for the last ten months, being citizens re-directed to other NHS facilities well away from their residency area. Recently, some Paediatric Emergency Rooms have also been out of service in Lisbon area. To make the situation even worse, many hospitals are also diverting doctors from scheduled activities, appointments, and surgeries, to fulfil vacancies in their emergency rooms.

Yearly, doctors in the NHS work around 8 million overtime hours, with an average of 300 hours per doctor, twice the amount according to the legal criteria. Moreover, doctors are demotivated, discouraged, exhausted and move away from the NHS daily to the private sector or emigrate, looking for better paid and working conditions. The ratio NHS:Private sector doctors is, now, 1:1.

Doctor union negotiations with the Ministry of Health started in April 2022, under an absolute majority of the Socialist party in parliament. Collective Bargaining process was finally signed in September 2022 covering a new work regime, valorization of emergency room work, specific rules of organization and work discipline and salary table review.

Nevertheless, doctor unions negotiations have been continuing for a notably long time, at a pace that is clearly too slow, and no suitable working proposals have been tabled so far. Doctors went on strike on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of March, summoned by FNAM. Adherence was very high in many hospitals departments and primary care. Doctors demanded to be treated with respect by the Government, aiming fair wages and dignified working conditions, allowing a sustainable balance between professional and personal life. Doctors have also demonstrated in the rally held on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, in front of the Ministry of Health in Lisbon, that want to be part of the solution for the ailing public health service to guarantee high quality health care to all citizens in Portugal in the NHS.

After doctor's strike, our Ministry of Health, has been sitting at the negotiating table and has finally promised to move forward with the review of doctor's salaries and remuneration supplement associated with a new work regime linked to productivity. However, concrete proposals continue missing. The negotiating protocol signed between unions and the ministry of health ends on 30<sup>th</sup> June. Doctors continue fighting for better working conditions, fair remuneration, progression in the medical career and improved parental rights protection.

A new President of Medical Board has been elected in March, who has the intention to defend the dignity and respect of the medical profession and to be intransigent in defending the quality of health and patients. Medical board is now working on a "secure and confidential channel" to receive

anonymous complaints of medical malpractice and organizing “a national doctor support office” to provide support, for example, in cases of violence, which include those of moral harassment.

Portuguese medical unions and the medical board continue demanding effective change in health policies, implementation of structural measures to support the NHS, and better health care delivery, which include improvement of medical careers, working and pay conditions.

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