When Doctors go on Strike, Where do the Medical Students go?

Abstract:
Sir

In October of 2013, the Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) took industrial action by going on a one-day strike that affected all the country's public hospitals. This marked the first doctor strike in Ireland in over 25 years. While the IMO took many precautions to limit the danger to patients, medical students around the country received very little information and instructions.

Leading up to the industrial action, medical schools from across the country collected over 2500 signature in a petition showing support to the junior doctors and advocating for better working conditions. Medical students are concerned about the working conditions that they will be facing in the near future and troubled by the depiction of the lifestyle of a junior doctor by McGowan, where junior doctors feel undervalued and unappreciated on a daily basis. On the eve of the planned industrial action, the vast majority of medical students had received no official statement. This resulted in many invigorated students coming up with a vast variety of opinions on how students should conduct themselves throughout the strike. Some were promoting non-attendance and others thought they should do nothing differently on the day. Some students even thought it was appropriate to join the picket line themselves, which was quickly corrected.

Students were put in a difficult position. They had to choose between their education and their principles. Many students wanted to make a gesture of support to their future peers and colleagues and felt that proceeding with clinical activities as normal would be taken as a show of opposition to the cause. Students were also concerned about the expectations of consultants during the strike. Would medical students be expected to take up some of the slack? Again, although this may have been an opportunity to increase their clinical competency, many of their peers would have taken this to be act of opposition.

With future industrial actions a possibility, it is imperative that medical schools collaborate together and create a policy for the behaviour of medical students throughout industrial action. When creating this policy it is imperative that academic staff take into consideration that many students are passionate about the cause, as it will directly affect them in the near future. Adopting a position that is rigid and inflexible may result in medical students blatantly disregarding their instructions. At the very least, medical schools should strive maintain an open line of communication with the student body.

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References