

Steel 15.11.15

Junior doctors on course to stage 'all out' one-day strikes

By **Tim Ross**

SENIOR POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

TENS of thousands of junior doctors are on course to walk out on strike next month.

The British Medical Association is balloting 40,000 junior doctors on whether to hold three days of strike action in December to protest against new weekend working patterns.

Senior government figures now concede that the union is likely to win the support from its members to go ahead with the strike, when the ballot concludes this week.

It would pave the way for a one-day strike in which junior doctors in hospitals would provide "emergency care only" on December 1, followed by a full walk-out from 8am to 5pm on December 8 and December 16.

However, Jeremy Hunt, the Health Secretary, is said to be determined that he will not back down over plans to reform NHS contracts for junior doctors.

He wants to ensure that there are more doctors on duty at evenings and weekends to reduce death rates among patients admitted to hospital on Saturdays and Sundays and improve services for patients.

A government source said the BMA proposal for two "all-out" strikes would inevitably hit patient safety.

The source added: "It seems impossible to see how the walkout of all junior doctors for two days could be safe for patients.

"We are going to continue to urge the BMA to come back to talks. We have put a very reasonable deal to doctors - it reduces their working hours and improves patient care at weekends.

"We are not going to budge from that position. We think it's a good deal both for patients and doctors."

Yesterday, hundreds of consultants in London gave their backing to the junior doctors.

The BMA has warned that the new contract will be unfair to junior doctors and unsafe for patients.