Health union makes breakthrough on jobs and workloads



(3 September 2018) At the end of last week, health service union ver.di secured an agreement on jobs, workloads and training at university hospitals in Düsseldorf and Essen in the North-Rhine Westfalia region of Germany.

As EPSU reported two weeks earlier, the union had been set for continuing strike action over workloads when the hospitals' management said that it didn't want to negotiate a collective agreement on the issue. However, at the end of August, following an intervention by the regional labour minister, the two sides agreed to mediation which led to an agreement on 31 August.

Wolfgang Pieper, ver.di executive member with responsibility for public sector negotiations described the deal as a "milestone" with the commitment to a significant number of new jobs. Ver.di's head of health, Sylvia Bühler, also welcomed the agreement but underlined the fact that this was a good first step and hopefully one that would send a clear message to the government that it needed to act on implementing national, legal measures on staffing levels.

The agreement provides for 180 new full-time posts in the two hospitals with 50 introduced this year, a further 65 by 30 June 2019 and the remaining 65 by 31 October 2019. There will also be new procedures to implement and monitor staffing levels for different sections throughout the hospitals, with specific measures such as bed closures, postponement of taking on further patients and reductions in the number of operations to reduce workloads where staffing levels are foreseen to fall short.

There is also a commitment to more training which will ensure that any trainees are in addition to any set staffing levels and with an assurance that they work under the supervision of someone qualified in the appropriate profession. The agreement will be put to a vote by employees in the coming weeks.

Elements of this agreement are similar to the one negotiated in April this year by ver.di and the management of hospitals in Ulm, Tübingen, Heidelberg und Freiburg in the Baden-Württemberg region of South West Germany.

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