

How tired do you want your doctor to be?

Published: January 15, 2026, 10:12 am

The [Guardian reports](#) this morning:

Representatives of British doctors, psychiatrists and nursing staff have warned that weakening working time regulations as part of the Brexit process would put the lives of patients at risk.

Changes to the current EU rules on a working week, rest entitlements and paid leave in the UK, with the option of opt out, have been mooted by members of Theresa May's cabinet when discussing their vision of post-Brexit Britain.

But leaders from the British Medical Association (BMA), along with 12 royal colleges and trade unions, have urged Theresa May to stand firm against Brexiters who want to scrap European laws, warning of risks to patient safety.

I would like to add a small personal observation to this. I am married to a doctor. When she was training, which was before the Working Time Directive came into force, there were occasions when she went on shift at 9 AM on Friday, and came off shift at 5 PM on Monday. The shift was, in other words, 80 hours long and covered four days and three nights. She was, of course, provided with a room to stay in at the hospital during the course of the shift but on occasion got less than three hours sleep a night on each night she was there. As she puts it, at the end of that period she was hysterical with tiredness, and quite unable to make effective decisions.

Is that the sort of doctor Johnson and Gove want to recreate?