Why doctors went on strike

Government doctors have been on strike for

about two weeks now. It is unfortunate that at

the end of the day, it is the patient who

suffers as a result of the strike. But did doctors

just wake up one morning and decide to

go on strike?

We have been trying to talk to the relevant

Government authorities about the implementation

of the Muya Commission's report since

last December, but to no avail. ,

Instead, what we have received is a barrage

of negative remarks and discouragement. The

demand for the registration of the Kenya

Medical Practitioners and Dentists Union

(KMPDU) has arisen from the need to have a

covering body that can negotiate doctors'

'working conditions with the Government as

opposed to individual representation.

The KMPDU also has a mandate for improving

the standards of health services in the

country as well are responsibility for health

education and other functions. I state this to

emphasise the other roles of the KMPDU, as

opposed to being a 'trade union'.

We are agitating for improvement of doctors'

working conditions as opposed to a salary

increase alone, although at the end of the

day everything is measured in terms of monetary

value.'

After five or more years of hard work at the

university, the young doctor emerges into the

employment market earning a miserable salary

of Sh6,000,a house allowance of Sh2,000,

and the so-called 'responsibility allowance' of

Sh 600 (which is supposed to cater for the

overtime work done - although more often

than not doctors are subjected to working 80

or more hours per week without off days).

In this era of Aids, it is important to have a

reasonable degree of protection from infection

by the HIV virus. How is a doctor (or nurse

for that matter) protected from infection

when gloves are not available, and when they

are available they are found to have holes. HIV infection is not the only disease doctors

are exposed to by virtue of their occupation.

We are also exposed to a host of communicable

diseases including tuberculosis.

Unfortunately, Government doctors receive

no medical cover.

Doctors are human beings and many are

married with families. Being a doctor does not

mean that you cannot get sick. With the skyrocketing

cost of medical care in this country

it is necessary for us to have medical insurance

cover.

Not so long ago, my colleague's child fell ill

and had to be admitted to hospital for treatment.

Although he worked for the Government,

he had to pay the cost of

hospitalisation. Is this the kind of concern we

expect to receive from our employer?

Our grievances are not just limited to remuneration

and benefits. After a long day (and

sometimes days) at work, it would be pleasant

to come home to a decent house. We are not

demanding bungalows or mansions that many

of our bosses in the administration occupy,

but we will not settle for leaking, rat-infested

houses that we are compelled to occupy due to

our state of poverty.

The list of doctors grievances can go on and

on, but at the end of the day how the current

crisis is solved will determine the future of

doctors in the public service.

Although many of us would like to serve our

country, we cannot carry on working in miserable

conditions given to us by the government,

and the possibility of mass exodus of

doctors from Government service is a reality. Dr A. Kanji,

Nairobi.

**Truths about the Aids virus**

It is true that some of our

national leaders have tended to

mislead the public that condoms

have been contaminated with the

Aids virus.

The truth about the virus is

that it can only survive in blood,

and also in body fluids like semen,

sweat, vaginal fluids. It may

also be present in tears as recently

reported in medical literature. If the virus is exposed to other

environmental conditions, it dies

within 17 seconds or so.

Condoms are sterilised and

tested before they are packaged,

and there is no way the virus can

survive the extremely high temperature

that the condoms are

put through during autoclaving.

J.D. Dngig.,

Sotik.