

# Bay of Plenty Times

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## Junior doctor looking to head to Australia

After two years working at Tauranga Hospital, junior doctor Caleb Armstrong is running out of reasons to stick around.

This week 51 junior doctors at Tauranga Hospital went on a nationwide 48-hour strike, but the 32-year-old said the way things are going he could well be working in Australia by the end of the year.

He was over there this week checking out the different hospitals and with the offer of a wage nearly 50 per cent higher and less unpaid overtime, he was finding it hard to stay in Tauranga.

"In the time I have been there [Tauranga Hospital] I can count eight registrars who have left. There are only seven registrar positions," he said.

"That's a turnover of more than 100 per cent in the two years I have been there. And at one stage we were down to three registrars."

Dr Armstrong, a psychiatric registrar, and currently studying to become a psychiatric consultant, said the problems of pay and staff shortages needed to be acknowledged before they could be fixed.

Junior doctors around the country report they are being paid \$23 an hour for a 40-hour week but are more often working closer to 55 or 60 hours a week, while locums can earn up to \$90 an hour and pick and choose their hours. With vacancies at Tauranga Hospital "through the roof", he had learnt not to waste free time.

He and his wife, an early childhood teacher, had no television in their home and instead spent quality time together when they could.

"When you are working to those conditions, covering a couple of colleagues and your boss is saying, 'that's no problem' ... [where] people can be harmed or die, it very rapidly becomes a personal feeling that this is something that should not be ignored," Dr Armstrong said.

The temporary contract for junior doctors was set to expire at the end of June leaving many feeling uncertain about their futures.

Rather than comment from the sidelines, Dr Armstrong wrote a letter last November to the Ministry of Health highlighting the issues - and warning it may lead to a strike in the near future.

When his predictions this week came true, Dr Armstrong was annoyed at Health Minister David Cunliffe's apparent surprise over the action, who has labelled the junior doctors' demands as "unreasonable".

Dr Armstrong said rather than "vilifying" the junior doctors for taking strike action, they should instead acknowledge the problem.

"It's the attitude of the employers as much as the money."