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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Health Care Workers to Hunger-Strike in Protest of Labor Conditions

By Anna Dolgov

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Health care workers in Ufa will go a hunger strike to protest labor conditions.

Health care workers in central Russia threatened to stage a hunger strike starting Monday to protest what they described as "repercussions" against co-workers who demanded better working conditions and higher salaries at previous protests, media reports said.

The hunger strike, planned in Ufa, the capital of Russia's republic of Bashkortostan, would be the third by medical workers in the city since the start of a labor dispute with local health care officials last April, Ekho Moskvy reported.

About 20 health care workers are expected to go on a hunger strike on Monday, joining the protest started last week by a local ambulance service manager, Svetlana Yusupova, the report said.

Protesters, many of them ambulance workers, accuse local authorities of imposing penalties

and putting "pressure" on their colleagues who took part in previous protests, Noviye Izvestia reported, citing anesthesiologist Irina Tishina, who planned to join the strike.

Supporters also accuse health administrators of having denied water for six hours to Yusupova, while holding her for an "interview" after she went on hunger strike last week, the head of a medical workers' trade union, Andrei Konoval, said on his LiveJournal social network page.

Local health workers were awarded salary increases after their two hunger strikes last year, but say many of their demands remain unmet, according to media reports.

In Moscow the RBC news agency uncovered an apparent plan to fire 14,000 doctors in the city by the year 2018.

According to an agreement signed by Deputy Health Minister Airat Farrakhov and Deputy Mayor Leonid Pechatnikov, the number of doctors at state clinics and hospitals in Moscow will be 40.9 per 10,000 residents by 2018, RBC reported Monday.

There are currently 64,900 such doctors, and with an estimated 12.4 million people expected to reside in Moscow in 2018, the number of doctors will have to be lowered to 50,800, the report said, citing data by federal statistics service Rosstat and City Hall's labor department.

RBC reported that money that had been used to pay salaries of the fired doctors will be used instead to pay their colleagues in order to fulfill President Vladimir Putin's promise in 2012 to raise the salaries of doctors to 200 percent of the regional average salary by 2018.

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