

# **Hong Kong medical workers vote down plans to extend their strike having earlier escalated their action by occupying key floors of Hospital Authority headquarters**

Saturday 8 February 2020, by [LAU Chris](#) (Date first published: 7 February 2020).

*Hospital Authority Employees Alliance falls 2,000 votes short of the target it set to extend industrial action into middle of next week.*

*Hundreds of doctors and nurses from alliance earlier took to fourth and fifth floors of Hospital Authority complex in Kowloon City.*

Hong Kong's striking hospital workers have voted down a plan to extend their industrial action but insisted they will continue to fight for better protection against the deadly new coronavirus and the full closure of the city's border with mainland China.

The **Hospital Authority Employees Alliance** on Friday 7 announced it would vote to decide whether to press ahead with the work boycott until next Wednesday. It garnered **only 3,000 votes**, short of the 6,000 vote – 30 per cent of its total membership – the union called for, while **4,000 voted against a further strike**.

*"It doesn't mean we are giving up," the alliance's chairwoman Winnie Yu Wai-ming said, announcing the **end of the strike**. She said they would use other ways to fight for their demands as she announced a new fund set up to support those who might face difficulties because of the strike. A teary-eyed Yu led her team to bow in apology for the disruptions that have affected, among others, cancer patients, ailing infants, and expectant mothers. "I hereby offer my most sincere apology to any people affected," she said.*

Hours before the strike ended, medical workers in the city had escalated their action on the fifth day by **occupying key floors of the Hospital Authority's headquarters**. Hundreds of doctors and nurses from the alliance took to the fourth and fifth floors of the authority's complex in Kowloon City to stage a sit-in and chant demands outside top management's offices, while others occupied the lobby.

The authority released a statement expressing regret over the *"forceful entry of the office complex"*, which had caused disturbances to staff and their safety.

The alliance, a newly formed union that emerged after Hong Kong's anti-government protests, began its strike on Monday 3 after the government refused to fully shut down its border with China, where the new coronavirus originated and was wreaking havoc. **It was attended by about 6,000 workers daily**.

The authority said the industrial action had led to severe disruption at accident and emergency departments and neonatal intensive care units, as well as to cancer and cardiac patients, although some had returned to work on Thursday to help looking after infants.

Yu (Employees Alliance) earlier proposed to the management that as an incentive for the strikers to leave the headquarters, the Hospital Authority should at least promise to fulfill some of their demands – such as revealing stocktake of protective gear, assuring not to penalise staff, and

following up on their concerns with meetings.

The alliance said the authority initially considered not to impose penalties on the strikers, but did not come up with any offer. *"It was an irresponsible management panel,"* Yu said. But the authority did not comment on it.

A nurse, who gave her surname as Wong, said she voted against a further strike. She said she had taken part in the industrial action because she thought the cause would outweigh the inconvenience caused by her absence. She was not on the front line and she thought her clinic could still function without her.

*"Our job is to help people,"* she said.

She said she was disappointed their action had failed to move the government and the authority over issues which *"should have been tackled by them without having the workers to go on strike"*.

A clerical worker, surnamed Ho, said she had voted for the strike. Working in a high-risk ward, she said she had come into contact with the families of many patients. Yet she was upset the authority had failed to provide workers after-hour support, such as accommodation. The dwindling number of masks in her ward also worried her.

The escalation followed a meeting with management on Thursday 6, which ended in conflicted accounts. While the management described the discussion as good and said both sides shared the same goal, strike leaders said they were disappointed because the authority had failed to give solid details on how to step up protection nor promises not to penalise those taking action.

**More than 1,000 demonstrators began to gather at the lobby of the Hospital Authority Building** at 10am. The alliance was supposed to have a private meeting with the authority at 1.30pm to follow up on their negotiation a day ago. But at 11.30am, Yu demanded to see the top brass and have an open meeting, instead.

At least two calls were made to what Yu said was a human resources employee, who hung up after noting their demands. Yu said further calls were not answered.

**Yu and the demonstrators then ascended to the fourth and fifth floor** where the top brass, including chief executive Tony Ko Pat-sing, who led the discussion on Thursday, are based. Demonstrators lined the aisles of the two floors as they waited for them to come past, while employees in the offices continued with their work. While they did not join the strike, some were seen passing food from their office to the those striking.

The authority's spokesman welcomed the union's decision. *"The [authority] will continue to maintain communication and dialogue with staff members and unions,"* he added.

It did not reveal the number of staff absent, nor did it say which departments were affected.

---

**P.S.**

<https://www.scmp.com/print/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/3049512/hong-kong-medical-workers-strike-goes-level>