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Action by United Christian doctors

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and FANNY WONG

DOCTORS at United Christian Hospital will start industrial action on April 1 amid growing disenchantment over poor funding and inadequate manpower.

Their move comes as the Government says it will consider inviting subvented hospital doctors and nurses to a committee that is negotiating with Government doctors on a new pay and working conditions package.

The United Christian Hospital Doctors Association last night said it would stop signing payment forms for medical tests done outside the hospital, and start a signature campaign among non-medical staff supporting their action.

Doctors at another large subvented organisation, the

Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, are likely to make a similar decision at an emergency meeting this afternoon.

Both doctors' groups said they were dissatisfied over the reply of Secretary for Health and Welfare Brian Chau Tak-hay who rejected their proposals for a direct dialogue with the administration. Instead, they have to go through their management boards to air complaints.

The Governor, Sir David Wilson, yesterday hinted that discussions with staff could take varied forms, including the new committee. He asked that staff co-operate to improve matters.

"You have to take account of the wish of the subvented sector to have a degree of independence," Sir David said after the foundation-laying ceremony of the

United Christian Hospital extension.

United Christian Hospital doctors presented a letter to the Governor requesting his personal intervention for representation of the subvented staff on the top-level committee.

Association Chairman Dr Ma Ho-cheung said their hospital urgently needed to improve its medical facilities, poor staffing ratio and funding.

Professor Arthur Li, chairman of the United Christian Hospital's management board, said subvented hospitals had always been poorly funded.

"We hope and we believe the Government will do something," he said.

Chief Secretary Sir David Ford was also understood to have promised Legislative Councillor Dr Leong

Chu-hung that he would consider whether the committee should have representatives from among non-Government doctors and nurses.

The subvented doctors' action comes amid a truce by Government doctors on their 11-day protest last Saturday while resuming talks in the committee hastily formed last week as a concession to the doctors.

Its formation, however, triggered the nurses and their subvented hospital colleagues into asking for a similar forum to tackle their complaints.

Government nurses are continuing their week-long action while the Nursing Staff Union of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals is set to begin its own movement if the management board fails to head it off.