
Debate on an e-petition relating to immigration

Westminster Hall
Monday 19th October 2015

The British Medical Association (BMA) is a voluntary professional association and independent trade union which represents doctors and medical students from all branches of medicine all over the UK. With a membership of over 154,000 worldwide, we promote the medical and allied sciences, seek to maintain the honour and interests of the medical profession and promote the achievement of high quality healthcare.

Key statistics

- Seven per cent of doctors registered in the UK qualified in the European Economic Area (EEA)¹.
- 22% of doctors registered in the UK qualified from outside of the EEA².
- The highest proportion of doctors from outside the UK continues to be specialty, associate specialist and staff grade doctors with 47%³.

NHS workforce

Much of the rhetoric about immigration has focused on the pressures that increased immigration has placed on public services including the health service, housing and schools. The BMA believes it is important to acknowledge the contribution made by highly skilled migrants, including doctors, in delivering and sustaining public services, such as the NHS and our universities.

International Medical Graduates (IMG) doctors have become essential members of the UK's medical workforce and the NHS is dependent on IMG doctors to provide a high quality, reliable and safe service to patients. IMG doctors have enhanced the UK health system over the years, improving the diversity of the profession to reflect a changing population, and filling shortages in specialties which may otherwise remain empty⁴.

The BMA does not support, and is not calling for, unfettered immigration of overseas doctors and recognises that the principle of reducing reliance on migrant workers and training and up-skilling UK resident workers to fill workforce gaps is valid. We do support the long-term aim of self-sufficiency in NHS medical staffing. However, the BMA also believes that it is essential to recognise that workforce gaps remain in certain regions of the UK and within particular medical specialties. Where such a situation exists, the BMA believes the NHS should be able recruit staff from overseas where there is no one suitably qualified in the UK.

The BMA also believes that employers must have the capacity to recruit and retain overseas doctors where other solutions to staffing have been unsuccessful and where a clear workforce need exists. It is essential that the immigration system remains flexible enough to recruit doctors from outside the UK/EEA should the resident workforce be unable to fulfil this. The consequences



of health providers being unable to recruit the staff they need to maintain service standards and deliver appropriate patient care are extremely serious.

Case studies

'The success of this nation was built by millions of hands, many from overseas – doctors, teachers, inventors, academics, businesspeople – and succeeding in the decades to come means staying open to those who can really contribute'⁵.

David Cameron

In May 2015, the BMA published a new document 'The contribution of international medical graduates to the NHS' in which the BMA profiled the experiences of 39 doctors who are working, or have worked in the NHS, but originally trained all over the world, with contributors from as far afield as India, Colombia, and Australia, and as close to home as Italy and Spain. They were asked a range of questions, including, **What are the main contributions of IMG doctors to healthcare in the UK?** Some of their responses are shared below⁶.

IMGs bring a lot of valuable experience and different ways of working from their country of origin. They bring different viewpoints and opinions that makes the NHS better and can help with patients from different countries.

Consultant, anaesthesia and intensive care, currently working in Scotland. Medical training completed in Iraq

The biggest contribution is undoubtedly the staffing of the NHS. UK graduates do not supply enough doctors for the NHS to survive, so without IMGs the system would fall apart.

Anonymous doctor. Medical training completed in Australia.

They enable the UK to have the workforce it needs. Without IMGs the NHS would not be able to meet the needs of the population.

Clinical fellow in general surgery, London. Medical training completed in Brazil.

IMG doctors make up a huge amount of the NHS workforce – 20 years ago there was a shortfall in doctors, and the NHS would have collapsed under the strain of demand if not for IMG doctors filling vacant posts. We have also brought our respective cultures to the UK, and have enriched the NHS, which suits the UK as it is a multicultural country.

GP, Bristol. Medical training completed in Greece.

For further information, please contact:

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¹BMA 2014 UK medical workforce briefing <http://bma.org.uk/working-for-change/policy-and-lobbying/training-and-workforce>

² As above

³ As above

⁴ [Contribution of IMG \(international medical graduate\) doctors to the NHS](#)

⁵ David Cameron, [We're building an immigration system that puts Britain first](#), Daily Telegraph, 28 July 2014

⁶ As above