

Rt Hon. Gavin Williamson MP

Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

12 May 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

Re. Support for doctors with childcare responsibilities

As chair of the BMA's representative body, I am writing to urge that you take action to ensure that doctors, who are working tirelessly to keep patients and the public safe during the COVID-19 crisis, are not penalised by additional childcare costs or left unable to work due to lack of childcare.

COVID-19 and the government measures introduced to tackle the virus have had a significant impact on childcare. Despite the government taking steps to financially and logistically support childcare settings, it has not been enough for many to remain open during this period. [With at least 57% of early years childcare settings now closed](#), there is currently not enough childcare provision for critical workers. Doctors and other NHS staff have seen their usual forms of childcare breakdown, leaving them facing significant increases in costs or forcing them to stay at home.

Doctors have resorted to paying for more expensive forms of childcare to cover the unsocial and additional hours they are now working. It is unfair that doctors who are playing a vital role in the fight against COVID-19 should be penalised in this way. Difficulties in finding childcare cover are also putting additional stress on doctors and other workers, who are already working in an unprecedented pressured environment. Others are using carers leave, annual leave or significantly reducing their hours so they can look after their children. As well as resulting in the unnecessary loss of staff at a time when services are already facing shortages, it is desperately frustrating for these doctors who want to be working during this vital time but are unable to.

We also have concerns that if early years childcare providers go out of business as a result of the COVID-19 crisis this will have longer term impacts on our members' work and family lives. Given that childcare responsibilities still fall disproportionately on women, it may also potentially widen gender inequalities in the medical profession.



The Prime Minister's statement at the weekend stating that those who cannot work from home may be able to return to work, further highlights the need for safe, effective childcare outside that provided by schools.

To ensure doctors with childcare responsibilities are fully supported during the COVID-19 crisis, we are calling for:

- Additional childcare costs for doctors working during the outbreak to be reimbursed
- The provision of additional financial and logistical support for nurseries and childcare providers to prevent closures
- Employers to ensure consistency across local policy arrangements so that carers' leave is fully paid during lockdown
- Local authorities to collaborate with local NHS bodies and childcare providers to secure childcare provision for NHS staff

These measures must be implemented as a matter of urgency to make staffing and rostering easier in the NHS, to support doctors and their children at this critical time, and to prevent them from incurring significant additional childcare costs. Enclosed is a report setting out further information on the issues raised in this letter. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these and our recommendations further.

It is vital that we get support for these doctors right, so they are able to continue to play a key role in supporting the NHS at this time of crisis.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Helena McKeown

BMA chair of representative body

CC: Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care