



The Rt. Hon. Priti Patel MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department
The Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London, SW1P 4DF

23 June 2020

Dear Ms Patel,

Extension of visas for stranded doctors from abroad

You may be aware that some of us have written to your department about the plight of many stranded doctors in the U.K. following the lockdown and termination of all flights to their home countries. We would like to clarify their situation further in order that you can better understand why it is important that they are granted a further extension on their visas.

These doctors had arrived in the U.K. primarily to give their PLAB (Professional Linguistic and Assessment Board) examination which was first scheduled to take place during the week of 18 March 2020. This examination would have entitled them to work in the NHS and is a necessary pre-requisite for entry to the General Medical Council (GMC) medical register. However, the exams were cancelled due to COVID-19, as were their flights to their home countries.

Recognising the distress of these doctors and many other like them, the Home Office granted an initial automatic extension to their visas until the end of July 2020. The GMC, for its part, announced that examinations would be resumed at the end of June 2020. This would have provided a perfect cushion for the doctors to complete their examination and return to their home countries well in time.

However, the GMC announced on 4 June 2020 that it was cancelling the scheduled examinations and no alternative date has as yet been proposed. We have been liaising closely with the GMC, and we understand entirely that the cancellation is due to the inability to provide a safe environment with social distancing for any examination to take place.

Regardless, this has increased the uncertainty for these young doctors, many of whom have been quite stressed and almost all of them financially stretched. Indeed, a number of organisations have been providing them with a range of support services which includes accommodation, food, pastoral support, lectures, etc. Their plight, far away from family, inability to work as doctors in this country or to be able to help their native country through these turbulent times, is not to be underestimated. BAPIO is aware of over 220 doctors – who come from 20 different countries - all of whom had hoped to start working in the NHS during this summer. Overseas doctors, as you will appreciate, form the backbone of the NHS and it is imperative that given the workforce shortages, we do all we can to accommodate these doctors.

Our understanding from the GMC is that it is a priority to hold these examinations this year, with tentative proposals for August of this year. This means that the existing extension to their visas until

the end of July 2020 will prove problematic to them. Moreover, an extension to their visas will cost £993 and it will take eight weeks to process their application. Furthermore, we are aware the Home Office have cancelled their priority service, for the foreseeable future, adding further strain and anxiety given the timescale for an extension to be granted.

Most of these doctors can ill-afford such large sums. We would urge you grant a further automatic extension, free of charge, to these doctors until the end of December 2020. This consideration would go a long way to ensuring these doctors are attracted to training and working in the NHS so in the long run such a goodwill gesture will most certainly pay off.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Chaand Nagpaul CBE, Chair of BMA Council

Dr Amir Burney, President, Association of Pakistani Physicians of Northern Europe

Dr Ramesh Khoju, Chairman, Nepalese Doctors Association

Dr Ibrahim Bolaji, President, Medical Association of Nigerians Across Great Britain

Dr Chandra Kanneganti, Chairman, British International Doctors' Association

Prof JS Bamrah CBE, Chairman, British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin

cc: Mr Charlie Massey, CEO/Registrar, General Medical Council, Regent's Place, London NW1 3JN