

BMA House
Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9JP

T 020 7383 6515

E publicaffairs@bma.org.uk

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP

Home Secretary
2 Marsham Street
Westminster
London
SW1P 4DF

BMA

UNISON
the public service union

Royal College
of Nursing

Tuesday 13th October

Dear Home Secretary,

Re. Automatic visa extension for health and social care workers

We are writing to you as professional bodies and trade unions representing frontline health and care workers to express our concern at the end of the automatic visa extension for them and their families.

Our international colleagues have made a vital contribution to the NHS during the Covid-19 pandemic and continue to do so, putting themselves at risk to care for patients on the frontline. This is a fact tragically underlined by the high proportion of healthcare workers who have died from the virus in the UK coming from overseas.

We welcomed the government's automatic extension of visas, free of charge, for healthcare workers, between 31 March and 1 October. This meant they could continue to contribute to the NHS during the height of the pandemic and not worry about the bureaucracy and cost of the process, allowing them to focus on treating patients. It was a clear way of the Government demonstrating its gratitude to those individuals working on the frontline during the pandemic.

It is clear we are now entering a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. With daily cases reaching record highs, we need to do as much as possible to retain the skills and experience of our talented overseas colleagues as we have an incredibly tough few months ahead. We still owe these workers a huge debt of gratitude and the very least we can do is provide them with some certainty over their immigration status for the remainder of the pandemic.

We are calling on you as Home Secretary to intervene to renew the visa extension as a matter of urgency, on a rolling basis for the duration of the pandemic, to reflect the ongoing crisis and to demonstrate that our thankfulness for the sacrifice of these workers has not diminished. All staff who have already paid to renew their visa should also be refunded.

The government must also ensure that the process for granting the automatic extension is robust and streamlined to provide reassurance to front-line health care workers so that they can concentrate on providing care to patients impacted by COVID-19.

Yours sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Chaand Nagpaul in black ink.

Dr Chaand Nagpaul CBE

BMA council chair

Handwritten signature of Donna Kinnair in black ink.

Dame Professor Donna Kinnair

Chief Executive & General Secretary, RCN

Handwritten signature of Sara Gorton in black ink.

Sara Gorton

Head of Health, UNISON