

Immigration (Health and Social Care Staff) Bill

Second Reading, 22 October

- The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how much we depend on our international healthcare workforce.
- We have welcomed immigration concessions the Government has made during the pandemic, including automatically extending visas for a year, granting the dependents of international doctors who die of COVID-19 indefinite leave to remain and abolishing the immigration health surcharge for NHS health workers.
- However, to truly reflect the sacrifice they are making, the BMA is calling on the Government to go further by granting all doctors currently on a path to settlement, and their dependents, automatic Indefinite Leave to Remain free of charge.
- These doctors who are already on the route to settlement in the UK, deserve to be rewarded for their service during the COVID-19 pandemic by removing the financial bureaucratic barriers to applying for residency – currently £2,389 for the main applicant. We set out this call in a [letter](#) to the Prime Minister on 13 July 2020.
- **The BMA urges MPs to vote in favour of Christine Jardine MP’s Bill that would ensure healthcare workers who have contributed so much to our NHS during the pandemic are given recognition for their sacrifices, as well as certainty over their immigration status.**

Around 29% of doctors working in NHS hospitals, and 12% of the overall healthcare workers in the UK, are from overseas. They deliver key public services, conduct vital medical research, and contribute to the overall economy¹.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted how much we depend on our international healthcare workforce. To truly reflect their value and contribution to our communities. We welcome the introduction of a fast-track health and care visa to help recruit registered health and care professionals into the NHS. **However, the BMA is calling on the Government to go further and grant all international doctors currently in the UK and already on the route to settlement automatic indefinite leave to remain.**

Automatic ILR would allow these colleagues to continue working in the UK with certainty over their immigration status and would remove financial and practical barriers to them continuing their invaluable contribution to the NHS. This is particularly crucial given the huge backlog of care and severe workforce shortages facing the NHS – the BMA estimates the NHS in England is short of around 50,000 doctors², whilst waiting lists are at an alarming, record high of 5.72 million.

As well as helping retain our vital international staff, granting automatic ILR would help to demonstrate the country’s appreciation for their hard work and sacrifice during the pandemic, when the UK has faced the highest death toll in Western Europe and continues to battle infection rates and hospitalisations significantly higher than comparable nations.³

¹ ONS, [International migration and the healthcare workforce](#), August 2019

² BMA, [Medical staffing in England report](#), July 2021

³ The Times, [UK worst in western Europe for Covid infections and deaths](#), October 2021

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, skilled international healthcare workers have put themselves in harm's way in the fight against Covid-19 on the frontline and a disproportionate number have tragically already lost their lives to the virus. It is only right that the Government takes tangible action to support this significant and vital segment of the NHS workforce.

Ensuring healthcare workers have certainty over their immigration status would truly reflect their value, contribution and sacrifices to our communities, not only during COVID-19 but throughout their careers, and we urge MPs to vote in favour of the Immigration (Health and Social Care Staff) Bill.

For further information, please contact:

Leah Miller, Senior Public Affairs Officer

T: 0207 383 6593 | E lmiller@bma.org.uk