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

Sent via email

24 February 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to urge you to take action to recognise the huge contribution international doctors have made working for healthcare services in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic by granting doctors on a path to settlement, and their dependents, automatic Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) free of charge.

Not only would this be an appropriate move in recognition of their commitment and sacrifices, but it would allow them to continue their invaluable contributions to the healthcare system without having to worry about their immigration status. We currently face the greatest healthcare backlog ever with a widely recognise workforce crisis – the UK simply cannot afford to put barriers in front of those doctors who wish to work here.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how much the delivery of patient care in the UK depends on our international medical workforce. We recognise immigration concessions the Government made during the pandemic, including granting the dependents of international doctors who die of COVID-19 automatic indefinite leave to remain and abolishing the immigration health surcharge for health and care workers. However, we believe this is another vital action that the Government should take to further support this significant and vital segment of the healthcare workforce.

Over the past two years, international doctors have put themselves in harm's way in the fight against COVID-19 on the NHS frontline, contributing their valuable skills and expertise to save the lives of others – and with a disproportionate number having lost their lives¹ to the virus.

The immigration system in the UK is one of most expensive in the world and it is crucial that these experienced doctors are supported by removing the financial and bureaucratic barriers to applying for residency, currently £2,389 for the main applicant and each of their dependents. This is a substantial sum of money on top of the huge visa fees, they will have paid to get to that point for

¹ <https://www.bmj.com/covid-memorial>

Chief executive officer: Tom Grinyer



themselves and their families. Our members have told us of the stress and anxiety of constant visa restrictions and having to worry about their immigration status while caring for patients on the frontline.

The BMA has previously raised this issue with the Government and Home Office officials, but two years on since the pandemic started, our members remain concerned that action has not been taken. Such a move would also be in line with action taken by other countries to recognise international workers' contributions during the pandemic – for example, France went one step further and granted 12,000 key workers citizenship under a fast-track scheme and cut residency requirements from five years to two.

Now is the time for the UK to take action to recognise the value of our international medical workforce and ensure we do all we can to retain them.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chaand Nagpaul', written in a cursive style.

Dr Chaand Nagpaul CBE
BMA council chair