

## **Enquiry into concerns raised by members at ARM 2022**

### **Background**

This 'lessons learned' review looks into the International Medical Graduate (IMG) dinner held on Monday 27 July 2022 during this year's ARM and awards given to Aseem Malhotra and Chaand Nagpaul. It follows concerns raised by members on social media, by former council members, and by a group of members in a letter to the Chair of the Representative Body and former Chair of Council Chaand Nagpaul. These concerns ranged from the appropriateness of the award given to Aseem Malhotra, the organisation of the IMG dinner and awards, and the involvement of the BMA and former Chair of Council.

### **Scope**

The purpose of the lessons learned review was twofold:

- Firstly, to ascertain and summarise the facts surrounding the events of the IMG dinner, the awards and the subsequent photographs posted on social media.
- Secondly, look at lessons learned and make appropriate recommendations regarding the Association's future processes.

The purpose of the review was not to apportion blame to individuals.

### **1. Organisation of the IMG dinner**

1.1 The IMG dinner, previously known as the overseas graduates' dinner, was one of several dinners organised informally and independently of the ARM organisational structure to take place on the Monday of the ARM. Other dinners held at the ARM included the Celtic and the Junior Doctors dinners. Such dinners have historically been a feature of the 'ARM fringe'.

1.2 The booking of the venue, issuing of the invites and the collection of monies for tickets for the IMG dinner was administered independently of the BMA, whereas BMA staff played a role in the organisation and administration of the Celtic and Junior Doctors dinners.

1.3 The BMA had no involvement in the organisation, choice of speakers or the format of the IMG dinner. The organisers were able to request that this dinner was listed on the ARM pages of the BMA website, as was the case with Celtic and Junior Doctors' dinners, through submission of the relevant form to the conference unit.

1.4 A copy of the form for the IMG dinner can be found in appendix A.

1.5 The lead organiser of the IMG dinner was Professor JS Bamrah and speakers were former chair of council Chaand Nagpaul and Aseem Malhotra. Having spoken to the organiser of the dinner as part of the review there were over 89 confirmed attendees. It is understood that the primary theme of the speeches following the dinner was to reflect on the life of Professor Kailash Chand.

1.6 Chaand Nagpaul was asked to speak as the then chair of council and close friend of Kailash. Aseem Malhotra was invited to speak as Kailash's son on the life of his father, but also on preventative medicine.

## 2. IMG awards

2.1 In speaking to JS Bamrah the lead organiser of the dinner as part of this review, it was ascertained that two trophies were planned to be given at the IMG dinner on Monday 27 June 2022. These were to Chaand Nagpaul as a champion for international medical graduates and to Aseem Malhotra to recognise his preventative medicine work. These awards had no connection to the BMA.

2.2 However, the awards were not given to the recipients at the dinner as the organiser had left them in his hotel room and not brought them to the venue.

2.3 The following morning (Tuesday 28 June 2022) JS Bamrah contacted Chaand Nagpaul by text message, while Chaand was on the ARM stage, asking whether he could give him his award and a photo be taken during the 15-minute morning coffee break.

2.4 A group photograph of Chaand in receipt of his trophy with BMA members and the organisers of the dinner was taken along with another of Chaand and past BMA president Neena Modi.

2.5 A subsequent photograph was taken which included the organisers of the dinner and members of the BMA alongside Chaand Nagpaul next to Aseem Malhotra holding an award. A further photo featuring Aseem Malhotra and Chaand Nagpaul was taken following a request from Aseem.

2.6 JS Bamrah tweeted a picture of the group photograph and photo of Aseem Malhotra and Chaand Nagpaul alongside the words: *Aseem Malhotra gets an award from International Graduates for being 'Champion of Preventative Medicine' @CNagpaul does the honours.*

2.7 Aseem Malhotra also tweeted the pictures on Tuesday 28 June with the words: *Truly honoured to receive the 'Champion of Preventative Medicine' award from the Chair of the BMA @CNagpaul. In my talk I said the science alone isn't enough; opposition from vested interests needs to be overcome to save the #NHS. It's time for REAL evidence based medicine.*

2.8 Following publication of the tweets, disquiet and numerous concerns were expressed by BMA members on social media along with council members on the council Listserv regarding Aseem Malhotra's award as it could have been interpreted to be endorsed by the BMA and awarded by the Chair of Council. Dr Malhotra holds views that are contrary to BMA policy, particularly regarding vaccination for prevention of SARS-CoV-2.

2.9 Following contact from Chaand Nagpaul both JS Bamrah and Aseem deleted their tweets. Screenshots of these deleted tweets can be found in appendix B and C.

2.10 The BMA, through its official twitter account, engaged with those raising concerns to clarify that Aseem Malhotra's award was not a BMA award, that the Association played no role in the decision to give him an award, and that it did not endorse his views. Chaand Nagpaul tweeted a similar message stating that it was not an award from him or the BMA as can be found in appendix D.

2.11 This was followed by a statement of clarification on Wednesday 29 June 2022 from Chaand Nagpaul (appendix D) apologising for any confusion caused, making it clear that he did not endorse the views expressed by Aseem Malhotra regarding COVID vaccinations. The statement was read out to ARM, published on the BMA website and shared via the BMA twitter account. It was also circulated to council members on the council Listserver.

### **3. Conclusions and recommendations**

#### **The Dinner**

3.1 The BMA had no involvement in the organisation of the IMG dinner, its format or the decision to make the awards.

3.2 By listing the IMG dinner along with others as an ARM fringe event, the BMA is supporting this event. As a result, a degree of implied responsibility for the conduct and content of such dinners falls on the Association, along with associated risks. This is true for the other dinners listed on the ARM website, but more dinners also take place at the same time. In the past, the BMA organised several dinners centrally, but divested itself of this responsibility following controversy around the Charles Hastings Wine Club<sup>1</sup> dinners at ARM.

3.2 Conference Unit staff are responsible for the operational delivery and smooth running of the ARM. It is not their job to vet speakers or attendees at dinners external to the BMA and in processing listings from organisers they do so in good faith.

3.3 The introduction of a vetting process, whereby each submission to list a dinner is checked over by senior staff and elected members, may mitigate the risk of possible future controversies.

3.4 The presence of 'official' (listed, endorsed) or 'unofficial' (unlisted, unendorsed) affects whether the BMA assumes responsibility for the conduct of such dinners. With the status quo, messaging must make it clear in the BMA ARM listings that these dinners are independent of the official ARM.

3.5 Thought must be given as to the purpose of fringe events listed as part of the ARM. Many of the current processes relating to the support of dinners and fringe events are historic and require updating. The ARM is there to support our members to discuss, debate and democratically form policy. The value of fringe events, during ARM is acknowledged by the ARM team.

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<sup>1</sup> The Charles Hastings Club was a BMA wine club that was disbanded from official BMA endorsement after the 2014 ARM

3.6 The BMA celebrates inclusivity and diversity. Each delegate must be able to eat a dinner with friends and colleagues during the ARM in a manner that does not leave anyone feeling isolated. Any new processes will therefore need to continue to enable the membership to network whilst removing any risk to the association.

3.7 The Representative Body Chair has made a commitment to review the processes by which all fringe and unofficial events are supported by the BMA, including but not limited to advertising and BMA staff support.

***Recommendation A: The representative body chair's review of the process by which all fringe and unofficial events are supported by the BMA should result in stricter processes and requirements from any supported fringe events about their content, any invited guests and speakers, unofficial awards as well as social media outputs. Any dinners listed may be subject to a vetting procedure to minimise the risk of bringing the Profession or the Association into disrepute. Dinners not listed will not be subject to vetting. Any changes will be implemented for 2023.***

#### **After dinner speeches and awards**

3.8 There is no recording of the after-dinner speeches, so this review relies on conversations with the organiser JS Bamrah, Chaand Nagpaul and other attendees as part of this review.

3.9 The main of focus of the evening was a tribute to Kailash Chand as it was the first-time people could come together in such numbers since his death. It was in the context of Kailash Chand being a former BMA board and council member that Chaand Nagpaul, to whom Kailash was a mentor, spoke.

3.10 As Kailash Chand's son, Aseem Malhotra reflected on his father's impact, their relationship and influence. It is understood that he then went on to speak about the influence of the pharmaceutical industry and preventative medicine.

3.11 While the content of whether Aseem's speech conflicted with BMA policy is not within the scope of this review, we received no reports or concerns that he expressed anti-vaccine sentiment in his speech. Separate parties highlighted that a number of attendees started leaving during his speech. It has been suggested as part of the review that the lateness and length of his speech could have been a factor.

3.12 It was suggested during this review that had the awards been given to Chaand Nagpaul and Aseem Malhotra at the dinner as planned, then the following day's photos (featuring the BMA logo which gave the perception the awards were related to the BMA) would not have happened.

3.13 What may or may not have happened if the awards had been given to the recipients on the evening of the dinner is a point of conjecture.

3.14 The organiser, JS Bamrah, thought it would be appropriate to acknowledge the contribution of both of the recipients in the context of the theme of the dinner as outlined above. He explained during this review that he did not intend to cause reputational harm to

the BMA or the former chair of council Chaand Nagpaul and expressed regret at the controversy caused, stating that he took responsibility for the events that had gone wrong.

3.15 During the review JS Bamrah stated that the dinner has never had a tradition of giving awards and that these awards were a one-off. He has given a commitment that no awards will be given at any future IMG dinners and that such an occurrence will never happen again.

**Recommendation B: *Committees and members should be reminded that BMA awards are co-ordinated by the awards and honours sub-committee and approved by BMA council.***

### **Photographs and tweets**

3.16 Time pressures played a part in the taking of the following day's photographs as there was only a 15-minute window in which Chaand could leave the top table at ARM. Confusion over the context in which the photograph was to be taken was also a major factor, as was the last-minute request for it to take place.

3.17 As chair of council, Chaand's normal practice would be to consult with relevant staff including communications and his special advisors over such requests. It was an oversight compounded by time pressures, the end of his tenure and the sense that he was 'among friends' that led to him not doing so on this occasion, which remains a matter of regret for Chaand.

3.18 In agreeing to be photographed Chaand Nagpaul explained he did so in the belief that it was a photograph with prominent BMA and IMG members of him posing with his award for being a champion for International Medical Graduates in recognition of his work in this area.

3.19 He was not aware of what Aseem Malhotra's award was for before being pictured with Aseem, explaining that there was no formal award presentation ceremony by himself to Aseem Malhotra.

3.20 It is apparent that a sense of politeness and being 'put on the spot' were major factors in Chaand being pictured with Aseem Malhotra and an award. Chaand has stated as part of this review that the photograph with him and Aseem Malhotra was a posed photograph with Assem's award and not one of him handing an award over.

3.21 It is understandable that the foyer of the conference venue was a convenient location to gather people for a photograph. However, the location in the ARM venue against the backdrop of the BMA logo, as well as Chaand Nagpaul wearing a chain of office added to the potential perception that the award for Aseem Malhotra was an official BMA award.

**Recommendation C: *Chief officers and senior elected members should be reminded of the expectation that they alert communications and relevant colleagues if they are to receive an award or are approached with a request to give an award, especially while they are attending or representing the BMA. Individuals must understand that chief officers and***

***senior elected members may need to pause and check with relevant BMA colleagues if there is doubt or they feel they have been inadvertently 'bounced' into a photograph that could cause reputational harm to the Association.***

***Recommendation D: A protocol needs to be in place about the photographing of 'unofficial' awards or promotional purposes for groups external to the BMA at BMA events.***

***Recommendation E: Guidance needs to be in place for elected members who wear chains of office on the settings and context in which it is appropriate to wear them.***

### **Access to BMA events**

3.22 Aseem Malhotra departed the venue following the photograph. It is unclear how he gained entry to the venue and whether he was accompanied by someone else given he was not a delegate to ARM. This year's ARM was the first since 2019 where delegates met in person. Additionally, there were a number of new security staff on the door who may not have felt fully empowered to deal with senior high-profile members (or non-members) seeking to bring members without credentials into the venue. It is noted, however, that ANY BMA member can request admission to the BMA AGM, which is held during the ARM.

***Recommendation F: For future ARMs security and staff should be briefed on the process for visitors seeking entry to ARM and security staff fully empowered to refuse entry to people without credentials. The mechanism for granting visitor access to BMA events should be explicit and clear and all delegates reminded of the process for bringing guests whether they are members or not into ARM.***

In concluding this report, the BMA has undertaken a review of events and given answers posed by those raising concerns (a summary of the replies to specific questions is given in Appendix F.

*Alex Flynn, BMA Chief of Staff, September 2022*

## Summary of recommendations

Recommendations	Who to take forward
<p><b>A: The representative body chair’s review of the process by which all fringe and unofficial events are supported by the BMA should result in stricter processes and requirements from any supported fringe events about their content, any invited guests and speakers, unofficial awards as well as social media outputs. Any dinners listed may be subject to a vetting procedure to minimise the risk of bringing the Profession or the Association into disrepute. Dinners not listed will not be subject to vetting. Any changes will be implemented for 2023.</b></p>	ARM AC & ARM Team
<p><b>B: Committees and members should be reminded that BMA awards are co-ordinated by the awards and honours sub-committee and approved by BMA council.</b></p>	Alex Flynn with Sally-Ann Cole
<p><b>C: Chief officers and senior elected members should be reminded of the expectation that they alert communications and relevant colleagues if they are to receive an award or are approached with a request to give an award, especially while they are attending or representing the BMA. Individuals must understand that chief officers and senior elected members may need to pause and check with relevant BMA colleagues if there is doubt or they feel they have been inadvertently ‘bounced’ into a photograph that could cause reputational harm to the Association.</b></p>	Alex Flynn with Communications
<p><b>D: A protocol needs to be in place about the photographing of ‘unofficial’ awards or promotional purposes for groups external to the BMA at BMA events.</b></p>	Alex Flynn with Communications
<p><b>E: Guidance needs to be in place for elected members who wear chains of office on the settings and context in which it is appropriate to wear them.</b></p>	Matt Lasham
<p><b>F: For future ARMs security and staff should be briefed on the process for visitors seeking entry to ARM and security staff fully empowered to refuse entry to people without credentials. The mechanism for granting visitor access to BMA events should be explicit and clear and all delegates reminded of the process for bringing guests whether they are members or not into ARM.</b></p>	Jane Lewis

## APPENDIX A

### 36th International Medical Graduates Dinner – Monday 27 June 2022

It would give us great pleasure if you would join us for the overseas graduates' dinner at the ARM.

- Venue:** Bali Brasserie Restaurant & Bar, Kingsway Court, First Avenue, Hove, BN3 2LR  
**Time:** 7pm for 7.30pm till 10.30pm  
**Dress code:** Cultural or traditional dress welcome  
**Price:** £45.00 per person\* including reception drink and 4-course dinner  
**\*Price of food have massively increased folks.**
- After dinner speaker:** There will be a tribute to our comrade Professor Kailash Chand OBE  
**Dr Chaand Nagpaul CBE:** Reflections of the BMA Council Chair.  
**Dr Aseem Malhotra:** The Public Health collaboration: Advocating for real evidence-based medicine.
- Reservations:** Please return the form below with a cheque payable to 'IMG Forum', by no later than Monday 4 June. Places are limited and will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. No late reservations or reservations without full payment will be accepted. No cancellations will be accepted after Friday 8 June.
- Organisers:** Dr J S Bamrah  
Dr Kumar Kotegaonkar, MBE  
Dr Amit Kochhar
- Correspondence:** Mrs Sam Marsden, % Dr JS Bamrah, Park House, North Manchester General Hospital, Delaunays Road, Manchester M8 5RB (clearly marked "IMG dinner")  
Email: [jsbamrah@aol.com](mailto:jsbamrah@aol.com)

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### 36th International Medical graduates' dinner – Monday 27 June 2022

Please complete all details in **BLOCK CAPITALS**

Return form to: Mrs Sam Marsden

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ First name: \_\_\_\_\_

Family name/surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Region: \_\_\_\_\_

Division/committee/medical school: \_\_\_\_\_

Specialty: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please let us know if you have any specific allergies: \_\_\_\_\_

Full names of guests attending: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of tickets required: \_\_\_\_\_

#### How to pay £45.00 per person

Cheque amount £ \_\_\_\_\_ (cheques made payable to "IMG Forum" – not the BMA)  
Or by BACS to: IMG Forum, Sort Code 77-19-23, Account number 44090860

Please collect tickets from Dr Amit Kochhar at the ARM (not the ARM desk)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Numbers are limited, so please do apply soon.



APPENDIX B



**JS Bamrah CBE**

@jsbamrah



@DrAseemMalhotra gets an award from the International Medical Graduates for being 'Champion of Preventive Medicine' @CNagpaul does the honours.



APPENDIX C



APPENDIX D



**Chaand Nagpaul**  
@CNagpaul

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Replying to @Not4Twos and @TheBMA

For avoidance of doubt this was an award from an IMG forum and not a @TheBMA award nor an award from me.

This Tweet was deleted by the Tweet author. [Learn more](#)

00:55 · 29/06/2022 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

## APPENDIX E



Some people may have seen a tweet shared by Aseem Malhotra suggesting that I had presented him with a BMA award. I would like to take the opportunity to set the record straight and apologise for any confusion that has been caused. This was not a BMA award and neither I nor the BMA endorse the views held by Aseem Malhotra.

The award was made by the organisers of the IMG forum, which holds an independently organised annual fringe dinner at the ARM to which I was invited as guest speaker. This is not a BMA organisation nor a BMA event funded by BMA.. This year's dinner was also a tribute to my late friend Professor Kailash Chand at which many delegates attended and I alongside others spoke in memory of our departed council colleague who died last year.

Out of politeness I appeared in a photo the next day with Dr Malhotra and other BMA delegates in the BMA auditorium during a break. I want to apologise to you all if this gave any impression that this was a BMA award or an endorsement from the BMA. I also had no role in the process or the choice of Dr Malhotra to receive the award. I clarified this on Twitter last night as did the BMA account thereafter. JS Bamrah, who co-organised the event and the award, also clarified this in a tweet. Dr Malhotra has also since deleted the original tweet.

Colleagues will know that I have been a strong supporter of Covid vaccination, and I played a leading role in the BMA's call for the vaccination programme to protect both the profession and nation. My practice has also led the delivery of covid vaccinations in my locality. I would not wish to do anything which in any way confused the vital public health message that covid vaccination is effective and saves lives

## APPENDIX F

### Key requests from member concerns letter:

The (immediate past) Chair of Council to publicly apologise in writing for appearing to endorse Dr Malhotra. **Done.**

The (immediate past) Chair of Council to make it clear via official channels that this incident does not reflect BMA policies and Dr Malhotra's appearance was in a purely personal capacity. **Done.**

A formal enquiry reporting to the Board and to Council regarding the events leading up to and the conclusion of this "Award". **Done. This forms the basis of this report.**

The BMA to recognise and highlight the negative effects from events which could increase vaccine disinformation and hesitancy. **Done. Communicated publicly immediately after the events described and within this report.**

This report should be published within four weeks open and public. Delayed due to witnesses being on leave. **Completed in 12 weeks.**