

NEWS



Visa changes could lead to hundreds of doctors leaving the NHS, warns BMA

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BMJ Careers

Proposed changes to visa rules could lead to hundreds of UK trained doctors leaving the NHS each year, the BMA has warned.

In a letter to the Home Office Mark Porter, chair of the BMA, said that recommendations for changes to visa rules made by the Migrations Advisory Committee could harm the medical workforce.¹ In the letter to immigration minister James Brokenshire, Porter asked whether the Home Office would consider giving specific exemptions for the NHS.²

The BMA said that it was worried that UK trained international doctors, of which there are around 500 each year, could be subject to the Resident Labour Market Test when moving from the second year of foundation training to specialty training.²

The association said that, under the current rules, international medical students and foundation doctors who have studied at a UK medical school are on a Tier 4 visa. When they start specialty training they move on to a Tier 2 visa and can apply for specialty training posts at the same time as UK residents. Under the new recommendations these doctors would be able to apply for specialty posts only after doctors from the UK and the European Economic Area had applied.

The association also warned against plans to set an immigration skills charge of £1000 a year for a visa. It said that—if it were applied to the doctors who were given Tier 2 visas from 2014 to 2015—this would impose a cost of more than £3.5m on the NHS.

It said that plans to increase the minimum salary threshold from £20 800 to £30 000 for a Tier 2 visa would stop doctors in training and specialty doctors from being able to work less than full time.

Porter said, “What these recommendations propose is that students from overseas who have obtained a UK medical degree will be last in line to get a job. This will very likely leave them unable to pursue a career in the specialty they wish to work in, and leave them with little option but to take their much needed medical training and expertise to another country’s health service where they are able to continue their training.”

He added, “Implementing these recommendations would also risk losing those doctors from the NHS who need to work less than full time, and will at the same time remove desperately needed money from frontline NHS services.”

Kamal Sidhu, a GP trainer in County Durham, told BMJ Careers that the proposals showed a lack of coordinated workforce planning by the government. “It is beyond belief that at times when both general practice and other specialty training are facing a critical shortage of doctors, such immigration changes are being allowed to be implemented to worsen the situation,” Sidhu said. “It is blatantly obvious that the department of health and home office are not talking to each other.”

1 Migration Advisory Committee. Corporate report: Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) review: tier 2 migration. 2016. www.gov.uk/government/publications/migration-advisory-committee-mac-review-tier-2-migration.

2 Porter M. Mark Porter to Rt Hon James Brokenshire, MP minister for immigration. 2016. <http://sentpressrelease.com/pressrelease/attachment/73108/c8645346-2215-4e18-b70a-8bab99d08c08/5c461fd3-a84a-4288-adb2-2eac0f6c1e41?fileDisplayName=Mark%20Porter%20to%20Rt%20Hon%20James%20Brokenshire%20MP%20Minister%20for%20Immigration%20160216.pdf>.

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