



NEWS

Four in 10 European doctors may leave UK after Brexit vote, BMA survey finds

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More than four in 10 doctors from the European Economic Area who work in the UK are considering leaving since the referendum result on the UK's membership of the EU, a survey has found.¹

The BMA's survey of 1193 EEA doctors working in the UK found that 42% were considering leaving since the public's decision that the UK should quit the EU, and a further 23% were unsure whether to stay.

European doctors said that they felt significantly less committed to working in the UK in light of the referendum result: on a scale of one to 10, their commitment has fallen from an average of nine before the referendum to six after the result.

They also now felt substantially less appreciated by the UK government: on a scale of one to 10 the average rating dropped from seven before the referendum to four afterwards. However, the doctors said that they still felt highly appreciated by patients.

Around 10 000 doctors who work in the NHS—6.6% of the UK medical workforce—qualified in the EEA, and many more EEA qualified doctors work in public health and academic medicine.

The NHS relies on recruiting foreign trained doctors to unfilled vacancies to maintain services, and figures show that the number of doctor vacancies in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland increased by around 60% from 2013 to 2015, the BMA said. Since the vote to leave the EU the BMA has been urging the government to commit to a future immigration system flexible enough to enable overseas doctors to continue to be employed and recruited, to ensure long term stability in UK health services.

Mark Porter, BMA council chair, said that many overseas and EU doctors working in the UK "are left feeling unwelcome and uncertain about whether they and their families will have the right to live and work in the UK after Brexit."

"These are the people who staff our hospitals and GP surgeries, look after vulnerable patients in the community, and conduct vital medical research to help save lives," he said. "Many have dedicated years of service to healthcare in the UK, so it's extremely concerning that so many are considering leaving."

Porter added, "At a time when the NHS is already at breaking point and facing crippling staff shortages, this would be a disaster and threaten the delivery of high quality patient care. But this isn't just about numbers. The quality of patient care is improved where doctors have diverse experiences and expertise."

"The government must act now to ensure long term stability across the healthcare system by providing certainty to medical professionals from the EU about their future in the UK. It must also ensure that a future immigration system allows the NHS to continue employing EU and overseas doctors to fill staff shortages in the health service."

Jane Dacre, president of the Royal College of Physicians, said, "The government, the NHS, and the public need to value and support all NHS staff, wherever they are from. Currently a quarter of NHS doctors are from overseas, and the NHS has benefited from their talents, abilities, and commitment to working with us in the UK. We must continue to support them, despite the insecurity caused by the Brexit situation."

She added, "Medicine is an international profession, with global cooperation in research, drug development, standards of patient care, and free movement of doctors around the world. This model has served the UK and the NHS well for decades: moving away from that model is a major risk to the success of the NHS."

1 BMA. An exit from Brexit. 22 Feb 2017. <https://www.bma.org.uk/news/2017/february/an-exit-from-brexit>.