



NEWS

THE BIG PICTURE

NHS staff march against passport checks

Zosia Kmietowicz

BMJ

*[Image: Claudia Moroni]*

Healthcare professionals and supporters took to the streets in London, Manchester, and Newcastle on 30 September to raise awareness about the charges being introduced in the NHS, often for the most vulnerable patients, such as refugees.

The marchers converged on St Thomas's Hospital, near Westminster, where they were invited to share their stories of patients being asked for identification or being denied care.

The protest was organised by the group Docs Not Cops (#patientsnotpassports) in collaboration with Medact Refugee Solidarity Group, Sisters Uncut, and Migrants Organise.

In February England's health secretary, Jeremy Hunt, announced that all patients who accessed NHS services would have their passport or other identification checked and that people who did not qualify for free care would be charged upfront.¹ The changes are being piloted in over 20 hospitals and will be rolled out nationally on 23 October.

Timesh Pillay, a core medical trainee in west London who has been involved in Docs Not Cops since last year, described the policy as a "scattergun" approach, with people with foreign sounding names being targeted. Pillay said that he had seen patients being visited on wards by Home Office staff, against official rules, and seen documentation in notes demanding that care be withdrawn because patients were unable to pay. "I have even heard of people who have asylum cases pending being told that they are not entitled to NHS care and that not paying could affect their case," he said.

The new policy was inappropriate in a country that had reaped the benefits of overseas trained staff and at a time when many countries were trying to establish universal healthcare, said Pillay.

"My motivation [for getting involved in Docs Not Cops] comes from the fact that the NHS is a leader worldwide and it is built on the foundation of resources from around the world. That it is broadly paid for by British taxpayers is false. It feels inequitable to me," he told *The BMJ*.

"We want to demonstrate to the public the hostile environment that is growing in the NHS [over charges]. This internal border not only applies to healthcare but to schools and housing as well. It is a carefully planned, multipronged attack on groups who are often the most vulnerable in society."

1 Wise J. Charging overseas patients upfront could cause "chaos," BMA warns. *BMJ* 2017;356:j655. doi:10.1136/bmj.j65528167739

Published by the BMJ Publishing Group Limited. For permission to use (where not already granted under a licence) please go to <http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions>