



## Race played no part in Bawa-Garba decision, says GMC

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The BMJ

The UK General Medical Council's decision to remove Hadiza Bawa-Garba from the UK medical register was in no way influenced by her race or sex, its chief executive has told *The BMJ*.

The comments from Charlie Massey came as the GMC announced that it had commissioned research into why black and minority ethnic (BME) doctors were more likely to be referred to it for fitness to practise issues.

Speaking to *The BMJ* at the British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin's conference in Birmingham on 21 April after making the announcement, Massey said, "I can be absolutely, categorically clear that the gender and ethnicity of Dr Bawa-Garba played no role whatsoever in my decision to appeal the case.

"There have been nine convictions for gross negligence manslaughter since 2004. We have followed the same approach whatever the doctor's ethnicity, whether they have been a consultant or a junior doctor. We have been completely colour blind in the way in which we have followed these through."

In 2015 Bawa-Garba, a trainee paediatrician, was convicted of manslaughter after the death of 6 year old Jack Adcock. In 2017 a medical practitioners tribunal decided to suspend her for 12 months rather than erase her from the register.<sup>1</sup>

In January the High Court ruled that Bawa-Garba must be struck off the register, after the GMC appealed against the tribunal's decision.<sup>2</sup>

The GMC said that its research would focus on why some doctors were more likely to be referred to the GMC by their employers. It will be led by Roger Kline, formerly NHS England's joint director of workforce race equality standard research and engagement, and Doyin Atewolgun, who was an

academic adviser to the Parker review on the ethnic diversity of UK company boards.

Massey told *The BMJ* that although the over-representation of BME doctors in its processes had been known about for some time, Bawa-Garba's case has given the issue a new perspective. "It is a longstanding issue and one the GMC has done a lot of work on over the years," he said. "This case has, of course, thrown it into a new perspective, and there have been real and genuine concerns about whether the GMC is applying its rules in a fair way."

Jenny Vaughan, a neurologist who runs Manslaughter and Healthcare, an online resource that follows prosecutions of healthcare staff in the criminal courts, welcomed the GMC's announcement.

She said, "We know there is an excess in referrals of BME doctors for GMC investigations. I've seen it at the sharp end myself with criminal prosecution, but underneath all that there is an excess in BME doctors being referred for fitness to practise processes.

Vaughan added, "There is a problem here, and what we need to know is whether there is prejudice and whether there is a racial bias. We have to answer those questions."

For all *The BMJ's* articles on the Bawa-Garba case go to [bmj.com/bawa-garba](http://bmj.com/bawa-garba).

- 1 Dyer C. Doctor convicted of manslaughter is suspended from register for a year. *BMJ* 2017;357:j2928. 10.1136/bmj.j2928 28619882
- 2 Dyer C. Paediatrician convicted of manslaughter must be erased from register, rules High Court. *BMJ* 2018;360:k417. 10.1136/bmj.k417 29374024

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