



LETTERS

GPS AND ELIGIBILITY FOR FREE NHS CARE

All patients with a GP should be assumed eligible for secondary NHS care

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Trusts responsible for charging overseas patients for NHS care have asked general practitioners to help them to identify patients who are ineligible for free care.¹

BMA policy on this is clear: “Doctors should not become agents of the UK Border Agency.”²

Furthermore, it is almost completely pointless. Since changes a few years ago, everybody is entitled to register with a GP in the UK. Doing so—coupled with having been or expecting to be resident in the UK—makes you “ordinarily resident.”

Unless there are reasons to suspect that an individual has come to the country for the express and main purpose of seeking NHS treatment, any patient registered with a GP should be assumed eligible for secondary care.

GPs should not agree to act as border agency staff in this way.³⁻⁵

Competing interests: None declared.

- 1 Mahase E. Migrant health: trusts asked GPs to identify whether patients they refer are eligible for free NHS care. *BMJ* 2019;367:l6002. doi:10.1136/bmj.l6002 31624066
- 2 British Medical Association. BMA policy book 2017-18. <https://www.bma.org.uk/-/media/files/pdfs/collective%20voice/committees/arm/2017/bma-policy-book-2017-18.pdf?la=en>
- 3 McCall B. UK NHS-Home Office agreement undermines patient trust. *Lancet* 2017;389:1087. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(17)30767-5 28322808
- 4 Potter J. Border control in a healthcare setting is not in the public's best interests. *J Public Health (Oxf)* 2017;39:219-20. doi:10.1093/pubmed/idx051. 28605764
- 5 Patients not passports: A toolkit designed to support you in advocating for people facing charges for NHS care, and in taking action to end immigration checks and upfront charging in the NHS. 2018. <https://patientsnotpassports.co.uk/>

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