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Covid-19: Ethnic minority doctors feel more pressured and less protected than white colleagues, survey finds

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Less than a third (29%) of black, Asian, and other ethnic minority doctors in the UK believe they are fully protected from covid-19 at work, whereas nearly half (46%) of their white colleagues do, shows a BMA survey of around 7500 doctors.

The survey, carried out between 16 and 18 June, also showed that doctors from ethnic minority groups were more likely to often feel pressured into treating patients without the proper protective equipment: 7% (127), versus 2.5% (110) of their white colleagues.

The survey included 5121 white doctors and 2069 doctors from “non-white or mixed/multiple ethnic groups.” Most (80%) of the respondents were based in England.

Although the report found that a worrying number of ethnic minority doctors were still not being risk assessed, the results did show they were now more likely to have received risk assessments than their white colleagues: 58% (1119) versus 48% (2287).

The findings came after medical and race equality organisations told *The BMJ* they were angry and frustrated at Public Health England for promising to examine why people from ethnic minorities were more likely to contract and die from covid-19 but whose review, published on 2 June, did not include recommendations.¹ The government later said it would publish recommendations after accusations that the proposals had been left out of the original report.²

NHS bosses in England were told to carry out risk assessments for all staff as a precautionary measure in May, after it became apparent that black and Asian staff were becoming severely ill and dying in disproportionate numbers.³ The BMA has warned that, according to its own record, more than 90% of doctors who have lost their lives after contracting covid-19 were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The BMA’s chair of council, Chaand Nagpaul, said, “It is vital that healthcare workers are properly assessed so that those at high risk can be redeployed to areas where they are less at risk or work remotely, while still providing a vital service to the NHS.

“Furthermore, the BMA has previously highlighted how BAME staff can be less confident in raising concerns and more fearful of being blamed if something goes wrong. Employers must ensure that these doctors are fully supported in coming forward and speaking out.

“Ultimately, it is crucial that lessons are learnt from this pandemic—especially with the risk of a second wave—so that we act to ensure that the colour of your skin does not dictate your chance of survival.”

- 1 Iacobucci G. Covid-19: PHE review has failed ethnic minorities, leaders tell *BMJ*. *BMJ* 2020;369:m2264. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m2264 pmid: 32513658
- 2 Iacobucci G. Covid-19: Government will belatedly publish recommendations for protecting ethnic minorities. *BMJ* 2020;369:m2390. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m2390 pmid: 32532737
- 3 Iacobucci G. Covid-19: NHS bosses told to assess risk to ethnic minority staff who may be at greater risk. *BMJ* 2020;369:m1820. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m1820 pmid: 32366503

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