



# Doctors welcome plan to scrap NHS fee for overseas staff

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Doctors have welcomed the government's decision to scrap the immigration health surcharge for overseas healthcare workers.

Speaking at the 21 May daily briefing, England's health and social care secretary, Matt Hancock, said, "We can remove NHS and care workers from the NHS surcharge as soon as possible, and I am very pleased to be able to do that."

He added, "The purpose of the immigration health surcharge within the NHS is a fair one. The purpose is to ensure that everybody contributes to the NHS, but those who work within the NHS or within social care are themselves making that contribution directly. So the prime minister has made that decision, and he has asked us to make that happen."

Introduced in 2015, the surcharge meant that people from outside the EU must pay £400 (€445; \$488) each a year to use the NHS. The charge will rise to £624 a year in October and will apply to EU nationals moving to the UK after the Brexit transition period.

Hancock's announcement followed calls from doctors' organisations and the Labour Party to scrap the charge.<sup>1 2</sup>

Responding to the decision, the BMA's chair of council, Chaand Nagpaul, said it was a moral victory that would bring huge relief to people facing bills of up to thousands of pounds.

"It's absolutely crucial that we recognise and value healthcare workers from overseas, who, as this pandemic has clearly

highlighted, provide an invaluable service protecting and looking after the health of our nation," Nagpaul said.

"The scrapping of the surcharge must come into effect immediately to show our gratitude for the effort and dedication our overseas workers give to the NHS and to their patients."

Andrew Goddard, president of the Royal College of Physicians, also welcomed the announcement but said that the government's job wasn't done yet. The government must also grant indefinite leave to remain to all of those people who worked in health and care during the pandemic, Goddard said, and extend the proposed NHS visa to social care. "Until this happens, we won't have truly recognised just how vital international staff have been during this period," he said.

Samantha Batt-Rawden, president of the Doctors' Association UK, said that her organisation was also calling for indefinite leave to remain for all frontline healthcare workers who have served in the NHS during the pandemic.

- 1 Rimmer A. Scrap NHS fees for overseas healthcare staff, says Labour. *BMJ* 2020;369:m205410.1136/bmj.m2054.
- 2 Rimmer A. Help end NHS fees for overseas doctors, campaigners tell medical institutions. *BMJ* 2019;365:l2348. 10.1136/bmj.l2348 31138541

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