

Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
Secretary of State for the Home Office
Home Office

Sent via email

6 March 2024

Dear Home Secretary,

Re. Impact of adult dependent relative rules on doctors and the NHS

I am writing to you following the results of a recent BMA survey showing the profound impact the restrictive adult dependent relative rules are having on doctors' wellbeing and their likelihood to stay and work in the UK due to being prevented from caring for their elderly parents in the UK.

Under the current rules, British citizens are only able to have their dependent parents join them in the UK if they can demonstrate that they require a level of long-term personal care that they are unable to get in their home country. Reaching the threshold of evidence required to prove this is often extremely difficult for applicants to do. We are deeply concerned that this rule is having an adverse impact on the lives, health and mental wellbeing of doctors with elderly dependent parents living abroad and are calling for urgent action to address this.

Our survey of 3346 doctors shows that if unaddressed, the issue risks doctors leaving the UK further exacerbating the existing workforce crisis in the NHS:

- 94% respondents said the restrictions on bringing adult relatives, such as elderly parents made it less likely they would stay and work as a doctor in the UK in the long term. Of these, 69% said it made them significantly less likely to stay.
- 84% of respondents say they know of at least one doctor who has actually left working in the UK in the last five years because they needed to relocate to look after adult relatives overseas.
- Seven out of ten respondents (71%) say they know at least one doctor considering leaving their job as a doctor in the UK in the next two years because they need to relocate to look after adult dependant relatives overseas.
- Two in five respondents (59%) say there are considering leaving in the next two years themselves.

These are doctors who are not only providing vital care in a system already buckling under pressure of workforce shortages, but they are often people the UK has spent time and money on training. It does not make economic sense for the UK to invest money in training doctors only for them to be forced to leave the country in order to look after their elderly parents.

The survey also demonstrates how the rules are already disrupting patient care with doctors being forced to take leave to provide care for their relatives overseas:

Co-chief executive officers: Neeta Major & Rachel Podolak



- 90% of respondents had adult dependant relatives overseas. Of these, 76% had needed to take time off work to provide care for their relative in the last five years – with 50% per cent needing to do so on more than one occasion.

Not only is this extremely challenging for doctors who already have busy and stressful lives, but it means they are often forced to take leave, and often make multiple journeys, taking them away from the NHS at a time when the system is already understaffed and doctors are suffering with burnout.

There is no overestimating the mental toll that permanently separating UK-settled doctors from their elderly parents has had. Members have reported an impact on stress and anxiety, morale and ability to focus on their work:

- 95% respondents said they would have less stress and anxiety if the rules were removed.
- 91% said their family relationships would be strengthened.
- 89% said their morale would improve.
- 87% said they would be able to focus more on their work.

We urge you to change the current rules and make it possible for the elderly parents of doctors working in the UK to be granted indefinite leave to remain and join their families in the UK. This has been achieved in the approach adopted by other countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

At a time when the NHS is struggling with waiting lists and understaffing, this will give doctors working on the frontline the reassurance they need to stay working for the NHS whilst fulfilling their personal caring responsibilities to their elderly parents.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P Banfield', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Professor Phil Banfield

Chair, BMA Council