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BMA criticises new visa requirements for overseas doctors

The BMA and the British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (BAPIO) have condemned the speed at which new visa restrictions for overseas doctors have been introduced in the United Kingdom. The changes, which mean that doctors from outside the European economic area (EEA) who train in the UK will need a work permit, have been rushed through with little regard for doctors' welfare, the associations say.

The new rules, which were introduced on 3 April, bar NHS trusts from recruiting junior doctors from outside the EEA unless the trusts can demonstrate that no EEA doctor is available to fill the post.

Jo Hilborne, chairman of the BMA's Junior Doctors Committee, said: "This has caused a huge amount of confusion and anxiety among overseas doctors. There is definitely a need for a new system where the number of doctors coming to the country is based on the needs of the NHS, but what the government is doing is completely unfair on the doctors who are already here."

The BMA and BAPIO are calling on the government to phase in the changes rather than impose them fully from the outset. (See p 932.)

Zosia Kmiotowicz *London*

Hospital is fined £100 000 for failing to supervise junior staff

An English hospital trust was last week fined £100 000 (£145 000; \$175 000) after pleading guilty to failing to supervise two junior doctors in an orthopaedic ward where a patient died of toxic shock syndrome after a simple knee operation.

Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust was also ordered to pay £10 000 towards the costs of the health and safety prosecution after the death of

Charity campaigners win radio awards

The blind musicians Amadou Bagayo and Mariam Doumbia proved that "disability does not mean inability" this month, when they won two awards—African artists of the year and album of the year—at the BBC world music awards on 7 April.

The Malian couple, whose rhythm and blues album "Dimanche à Bamako" has sold more than 500 000 copies worldwide, are ambassadors for Sight Savers International and are currently campaigning to end discrimination against disabled children, as well as fund raising for the Bamako Institute for the Young Blind, where they met and fell in love.

"I lost my sight at 15 due to cataracts, but was fortunate enough to go to the Bamako Institute for the Blind. The education I gained there has given me so many opportunities," said Mr Bagayo. "It saddens me to think that 40 million children around the world will not be afforded the same opportunities. Disability does not mean inability."

Mr Bagayo said that virtually all disabled children in developing countries are excluded from school. "Disability presents a huge barrier to accessing education in countries where resources are limited."

Peter Moszynski *London*

See www.sightsavers.org and www.amadou-mariam.com.

Sean Phillips, 31, at Southampton General Hospital in June 2000.

The fine is a blow to the trust, which overspent by £6m in the last financial year.

The prosecution, the first of its kind, has alarmed other NHS trusts, because most untoward incidents involve some systems failure and not just individual negligence (*BMJ* 2006;332:135, 21 Jan).

The two senior house officers, Amit Misra and Rajeev Srivastava, were convicted of manslaughter by gross negligence in 2003 and sentenced to 18 months in prison, suspended for two years (*BMJ* 2003;326:840). Last year the General Medical Council suspended Dr Misra from practice for one year and Dr Srivastava for six months.

Clare Dyer *legal correspondent, BMJ*

Computer scientists call for audit of NHS IT programme

Leading British computer scientists have called for an independent audit of the NHS's information technology programme to verify that the network of systems being installed in England is technically feasible and secure.

In an open letter to the parliamentary select committee on health, academic experts in computer science, engineering, and security last week urged the committee to ask for an independent technical assessment of the £6bn (£8.7bn; \$10.5) programme "with all possible speed." Signatories include

former advisers to the government and to the BMA, who question the wisdom of continuing the programme without an "independent assessment of its basic technical viability."

The letter reflects concern among computer scientists that commercial IT products are inherently unsuitable for the development of very large and complex systems of the kind being created by the NHS national programme for IT. It claims that objective information about the programme's progress "is not available to external observers," and it suggests that the audit should ask "challenging questions" about the technical architecture and detailed design of systems being created under the programme.

Michael Cross *London*

Welsh NHS heads for £32m deficit

NHS Wales is heading for a deficit of £32m (£46m; \$56m), it was reported last week.

The auditor general for Wales, Jeremy Colman, has announced that Welsh NHS trusts are predicting they will have overspent by £26m in the financial year 2005-6, with Health Commission Wales—the executive agency of the Welsh Assembly government that advises NHS Wales on commissioning services—predicting its own deficit of a further £10m.

The auditor general's report says that although local health boards were projecting that they would mostly meet their 2005-6 resource limits, with an overall net surplus of some £4m, most Welsh NHS trusts were forecasting that they would not break even, resulting in a total overspend of £26m by the end of the financial year.

Mr Colman also found that although most trusts met their financial targets last year they are now in debt to the tune of £82m—£55m of which is repayable by 2009, threatening to put extra pressure on organisations in the years to come.

Roger Dobson *Abergavenny*

Is the NHS in Wales Managing within its Available Resources? is accessible at www.wao.gov.uk.