



Supporting patients from migrant communities

Dr Hannah Theodorou, Londonwide LMCs Medical Director for North West London and Board Member of Doctors of the World writes about GPs' obligations and best practice when registering and caring for migrant patients.

Supporting patients from migrant communities can be incredibly rewarding but also comes with challenges, especially as the system struggles to cope with increasing patient demand and the pressures from Covid-19. Everyone has a right to access primary care regardless of immigration status or the ability to provide proof of identification or address, and practices are at risk of breach notices if they fail to register patients. There are often a number of reasons why people may not be able or willing to provide this documentation, often because the paperwork has been lost in transit or confiscated in the case of individuals have been trafficked, or there are fears about being reported to the Home Office.

We often get queries regarding patient registration and access for migrant patients so we've pulled together some resources to support practices to help understand both the regulations and how to best support these patients.

The BMA have outlined the regulations in relation to entitlement to care for non-UK residents on their website. This emphasises that everyone is entitled to free primary care, but the rules around access to secondary care vary according to immigration status. Refugees and asylum seekers that have an active application or appeal are entitled to full NHS care. This does not apply to overseas visitors or those who have a refused application. Further details regarding overseas visitors is also available on their website. This can potentially place practices in the position where they are caring for patients who have limited access to secondary care resources. If this is proving to be a challenge, please reach out to your LMC for support and further guidance.

The Safe Surgeries toolkit created by Doctors of the World, endorsed by the BMA and RCGP, has been designed to outline some simple steps regarding how practices can support patients with registering at their practice in an environment that feels safe and supportive. This includes practice and patient-facing resources with posters in multiple languages. There is also additional information specific to caring for migrant patients during the Covid-19 pandemic, including enabling access to the Covid-19 vaccine and translated resources for self-care for Covid infection and when to seek help. There is also a specific toolkit for social prescribing link workers.

The RCGP module on Health Inequalities may also be of wider interest to clinicians.