

5th July 2022

Dear British Medical Association

We are UK doctors writing to request that the BMA commit to supporting and actively advocating for its members who are living with Long Covid. This must be a priority for the BMA because of the high prevalence of Long Covid within the medical workforce, and because much of this illness results from occupational exposure to SARS-CoV-2.

Long Covid is a debilitating, chronic, multi-system physical illness occurring in individuals after infection with SARS-CoV-2.[1] The number of people living with Long Covid in the UK is now estimated to number approximately 2 million.[2] A large proportion of affected individuals are healthcare workers, many of whom developed this disease due to occupational exposure to the virus while providing vital medical care to patients with Covid-19. The rate of self-reported Covid-19 believed to have been caused by workplace exposure is around 4 times higher in health and social care workers compared to workers across all industries.[3] Moreover, health and care workers are seven times more likely to have severe Covid-19 than other workers.[4] Recent ONS figures estimate that at least 199,000 NHS workers are currently living with Long Covid.[5] This is in addition to over 2100 health and social care workers who have lost their lives due to Covid-19, including at least 50 doctors.[6][7]

Throughout the pandemic, health and social care workers have continued to provide essential healthcare, at considerable risk to themselves. In many cases, there has not been adequate protection of health care staff working with patients with Covid-19.[8] For example, evidence indicates inadequacies in PPE policy and provision, specifically absence of respiratory protective equipment, has left health and care workers exposed to an airborne pathogen.[9] Of note, many people living with Long Covid meet the definition of disability, as defined by the Equality Act 2010, i.e. a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.[10]

Conflicting information exists across the nations of the UK about how they will continue to manage employment and pay for NHS employees who are sick due to Long Covid. This is leading to inconsistencies in how doctors are being managed and supported.[11]

There are large numbers of NHS healthcare professionals - including primary care staff, bank staff, and NHS locums - that have received inadequate financial support, or none at all. These workers have found themselves in financial hardship, some losing their homes, and/or having to declare bankruptcy.

For others, NHS Covid sick pay will soon stop. We are deeply concerned that NHS employees who are still unwell with Long Covid are already facing formal absence processes or will soon do so, and are at significant risk of losing their income and careers.

There is a moral responsibility to ensure support for those who are now facing significant ill health and disability after risking their lives and health to look after those most in need. This must include action from the BMA, whose purpose is to advocate for doctors.

It will be egregious for doctors to lose their jobs, lose their incomes, and potentially be rendered destitute as a result of this illness, which in many cases results directly from providing vital healthcare to the nation during the pandemic. Doctors in this situation will effectively be penalised for having an occupational injury. Long Covid in the medical workforce must be formally recognised as an occupational illness, as has occurred in other European countries.[12]

At present, there is no contingency in place for healthcare workers in the position of losing their job due to Long Covid. There must be a plan for compensation for doctors who have experienced this occupational injury, and provision for doctors who endure this terrible illness. Although individuals may be pursuing individual claims for compensation, while continuing to be unwell, and at considerable personal expense, we strongly feel there must be a wider, co-ordinated plan for obtaining compensation and provision for doctors in this situation from a central, powerful advocacy body, i.e. from the BMA.

We are calling upon the BMA to commit to the following:

1. To ensure support for doctors unwell with a long-term covid-related absence:
 - i) To advocate for all doctors with Long Covid to remain in employment and to have protected income;
 - ii) To lobby for a contingency plan to provide support for any doctors who are unable to remain in employment due to Long Covid, including financial support;
2. To actively lobby for Long Covid in the medical and healthcare workforce to be recognised as an occupational injury;
3. To actively lobby for doctors with Long Covid, as a result of occupational injury, to receive compensation.

We ask for you to meet with a contingent of us to discuss these issues further. We hope that, at this meeting, we can discuss how you may already be addressing these issues, and how you intend to move forward with addressing this vital work in the future.

Yours sincerely, the undersigned

See signatures of 206 BMA members, beginning page 6

CC Letter to:

Steve Barclay MP	Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, UK
Jeremy Hunt MP	Chair of the Health and Social Care Select Committee, UK
Humza Yousaf MSP	Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Scotland
Eluned Morgan MS	Minister for Health and Social Services, Wales
Robin Swann, MLA	Minister for Health, Northern Irish Assembly
Prof Raymond Agius	Chair, BMA Occupational Medicine Committee
Layla Moran MP	Chair, All Party Parliamentary Group on Coronavirus
Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP	Member of the Scottish Cross Party Group on Long Covid
Prof David Nabarro	Special Envoy on Covid-19 for the World Health Organization
Prof Dame Helen Stokes-Lampard	Chair of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges
Prof Andrew Elder	President, Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

Mr Mike McKirdy	President, Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow
Dr Andrew Goddard	President, Royal College of Physicians (London)
Prof Michael Griffin	President, Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh
Prof Neil Mortensen	President, Royal College of Surgeons of England
Prof Dame Clare Gerada	President, Royal College of General Practitioners
Prof Steven Nimmo	President, Faculty of Occupational Medicine
Dr Fiona Donald	President, Royal College of Anaesthetists
Dr Alison Pittard	Dean, Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine
Mr Edward Morris	President, Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology
Prof Bernard Chang	President, Royal College of Ophthalmologists
Dr Camilla Kingdon	President, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health
Prof Mike Osborn	President, Royal College of Pathologists
Dr Adrian James	President, Royal College of Psychiatrists
Prof Maggie Rae	President, Faculty of Public Health
Dr Jeanette Dickson	President, Royal College of Radiologists
Dr Steve Boorman	Chair, Council for Work and Health
Prof Ewan MacDonald	Lead, Society of Occupational Medicine Long Covid Taskforce
Nick Pahl	CEO, Society of Occupational Medicine
Helen Hughes	CEO, Patient Safety Learning

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Electronically signed by the following members of the British Medical Association

Dr Kelly Fearnley	Foundation Doctor	Bradford
Shaun Peter Qureshi	Specialty Trainee (ST5) in Palliative Medicine	Glasgow
Abigail Carey	ST5 in Geriatric & General Internal Medicine	Liverpool
Alexandra Black	GPST1	Birmingham
Alexandra Davidson	GP	Cambridge
Alison Timmis	Consultant Paediatrician	Chester
Alyshea Hodgson	CT1	Bradford
Amali Lokugamage	Consultant	London
Amar Sharif	Consultant Gastroenterologist	London
Amy Pearson	Consultant ENT Surgeon	Hull
Angela O'Donoghue	GP partner	York
Anna Porter	Salaried GP	Tunbridge Wells
Annalisa Field	Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist	Leeds
Annalise Short	F2	Leeds
Avril Washington	Consultant Paediatrician	London
Catherine Maytum	GP	Bristol
Catherine Mckenzie	Cons O and G	Lancashire
Catriona Semple	Consultant Vascular Surgeon	Dundee and Kirkcaldy
Christopher James Dixon	GP	Edinburgh
Christopher ward	GP	London
Cilla Rosen	GP	Petersfield
Danny Vincent	GPST3	Southend
David Tomlinson	Consultant Cardiologist and Electrophysiologist	Plymouth
Dawn Washington	Consultant	Preston
Dr Anna Heath	Core trainee in psychiatry	York

Dr Anna Smith	GP	Cardiff
Dr Binita Kane	Consultant Respiratory Physician	Manchester
Dr Claire Rees	Salaried GP	London
Dr Clare Singleton	GP	Manchester
Dr Donna Tootb	GP/Long Covid Assessor	London
Dr Eleanor Draeger	Consultant	London
Dr Emily Jane Saunders	Salaried GP	Leeds
Dr Jing-yee Hung	Critical care doctor	London
Dr Kelly Cruickshank	ST5 Doctor, Old Age Psychiatry	Manchester
Dr Kerry Smith	Salaried GP	Chichester
Dr Lise Hertel	Locum GP and associate medical director	Outer Hebrides
Dr Louise Chappell	GP	Nantwich
Dr Mark Fabrowski	GP	Brighton & Hove
Dr Rachel Boughen	GP	Herefordshire
Dr Rachel Duncan	GP	Brighton
Dr Rebecca Specht	ST6 O&G	Cardiff
Dr Sarah Annetts MRCGP	GP Partner	High Wycombe
Dr Sarah Mason-Whitfield	GP & Emergency Medicine GP	London
Dr Tara George	GP	Chesterfield
Dr Timothy William Robinson	GP Lead Long Covid	Post Covid Service Dorset
Dr Victoria Meakin	Salaried GP	Newport, Gwent, Wales
Dr Yasmin Razak	GP Trainer	London
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Evelyn Doak	Specialty doctor	Wishaw
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Ian Barros D'Sa	Consultant radiologist	Birmingham
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Jennifer Mayes	Consultant Psychiatrist	Portsmouth
Jenny Judge	Consultant	Epsom
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Laura McTague	Consultant in Palliative Medicine	Sheffield
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Linn Jarte	CT1 Anaesthetist	Swansea, Wales
Lynn Thompson	GP	Bristol
Ma Khine	GPST2	Salisbury
Madiha Mohyuddin	SHO	London
Margarita Thomson	GP	London
Marianne Tinkler	Respiratory consultant	Swindon
Marie-Claire Grounds	Consultant Physician	Kirkcaldy

Martin von Fragstein	GP	Beccles
Michael Groszmann	Consultant	London
Michelle phillips	GP	Stroud
Natasha Sheppard (Dr Natasha Tracey)	GP	Oxford
Olivia Cooper	GPST3	Warwickshire
Olivia Davies	Staff grade doctor in geriatrics	Poole
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Sharon Taylor	Consultant liaison child psychiatrist	London
Shona Johnston	Honorary clinical fellow	Oxford
Sonia Parmar	Consultant	Manchester
Sudheer Surapaneni	Trust doctor	Luton

Theresa Howe	Consultant	Cardiff
Ursula Hartley	Associate specialist	Southampton
Yvonne Abimbola	GP Partner	Gravesend

And 101 further signatories who did not wish to be named publicly, but are included in the version of this letter submitted directly to the BMA.