

Will the UK Experience Problems with Medical Personnel Due to Health and Care Visa Changes?

The [Health and Care Visa](#) was introduced to streamline the entry of qualified healthcare professionals into the UK and address immediate staffing needs in the NHS and private sector.

However, following James Cleverly's announcement in December 2023 about [changes to certain visa routes to reduce net migration](#), there have been concerns about the impact of these reforms on the availability of healthcare workers and the sector's ability to fill critical roles.

We'll discuss each update to the Health and Care route and their potential impact on the UK healthcare sector.



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Impact of Care Provider Registration on Care Workers

Starting on 11 March 2024, the government mandated care providers in England to register with the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the industry regulator for Health and Social Care, before sponsoring migrant care workers.

This move was made to address concerns about worker exploitation and abuse. There were cases of organisations and individuals offering care jobs under false pretences, charging illegal recruitment fees, and burdening workers with repayment

clauses.

There were also concerns about non-compliance among sponsors, as many care providers that didn't exist were found to have gotten care home visas and sponsor licences from the Home Office.

While the tighter crackdown on care providers was a good move, many migrant workers found themselves without jobs when some sponsors lost their licences. They were given 60 days to find new employment in the sector or leave the country.

The Home Office hasn't published any report on how many foreign care workers in the UK have had to leave the country yet. However, this situation has led to emotional toll for many, especially those with families and others who had to give up all they had in their resident countries to come to the UK.

The Restriction on Care Workers' Dependents

One of the strictest rules that came into effect in March was the ban on care workers and senior care workers from bringing their dependent family members to the UK.

This new policy is equally devastating for workers with families. Many critics warned that foreign care workers might consider migrating to other countries instead of facing the possibility of not being with their loved ones.

Data from 2023 showed that there are 152,000 vacancies in the sector, and 440,000 people are projected to be needed to meet the demand for care workers by 2035. With the ban on dependents, labour shortages in the care sector will persist.

The Home Office recently released data showing that the number of applications from main visa applicants on the health and

care route in April 2024 dropped to 2,200 compared with 12,200 applications recorded in April 2023.

Effect of New Minimum Wage Across the UK

The minimum income threshold for health and care jobs increased in April 2024. Roles on national pay scales will now pay at least £23,200 annually, and those outside national pay scales must now pay at least £29,000.

The UK government also abolished the Shortage Occupation List (SOL) and replaced it with the Immigration Salary List (ISL). The health and care roles on the ISL are expected to meet a minimum income threshold of £23,200 annually.

Adult care homes in the UK are already struggling financially to run their services, including paying employees, as funding from local authorities has not been sufficient. The increased threshold will likely strain their finances further.

According to Care England, 79% of publicly funded adult care homes lack the financial resources to accommodate the new wages. Consequently, some care providers are contemplating closing down entirely if local authorities fail to provide sufficient funding to cover the increased workforce costs.

Removal of Roles on the Shortage Occupation List

The new Immigration Salary List (ISL) introduced based on recommendations from the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) reduced the number of roles on the old Shortage Occupation List (SOL).

The SOL featured approximately 30% of job roles eligible for the Skilled Worker Visa, but the ISL has only 8% of the jobs

on the skilled route, which is a total of 23 roles.

As a result, some occupations, including health and care roles, such as nurses, are now excluded from the ISL. This is because roles on national pay scales do not benefit from being on the list since their occupation-specific threshold is above the threshold of £23,200.

However, the government has stressed that exempting some healthcare roles doesn't mean that such occupations are not in shortage, nor does it undermine their value to the UK health sector.

How Does the New Policy Affect NHS Staff?

NHS staff and medical personnel such as doctors, nurses, and lab scientists in the private healthcare sector are the least affected by most of the recent changes in the health and care route.

They can continue to bring dependents with them to the UK. Additionally, the increase in the income threshold may not affect them. For instance, those in Scotland whose roles are under the NHS bands are already above the £23,200 threshold.

For healthcare workers in England and Wales, the threshold is below the top pay point in band 3. Since the new changes apply to existing visa holders on the health and care route, it could be a concern to workers when extending their visas.

Conclusion

The government has insisted that the new eligibility requirements for the UK Health and Care Worker Visa, as well as other immigration pathways, are for the good of the British people. However, if skilled medical personnel cannot

contribute to the health sector, more people will not get the essential care they need.

While the government is implementing new measures to attract more local care workers, the impact on the care sector is yet to be seen.