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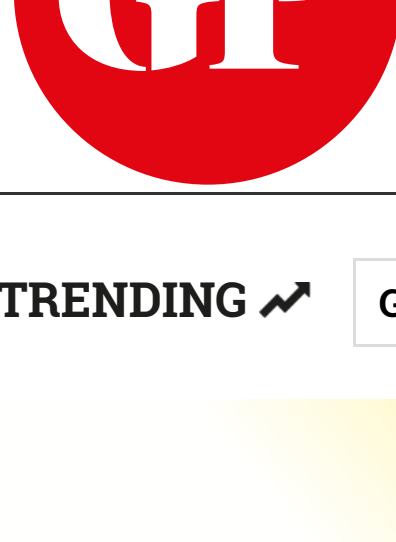
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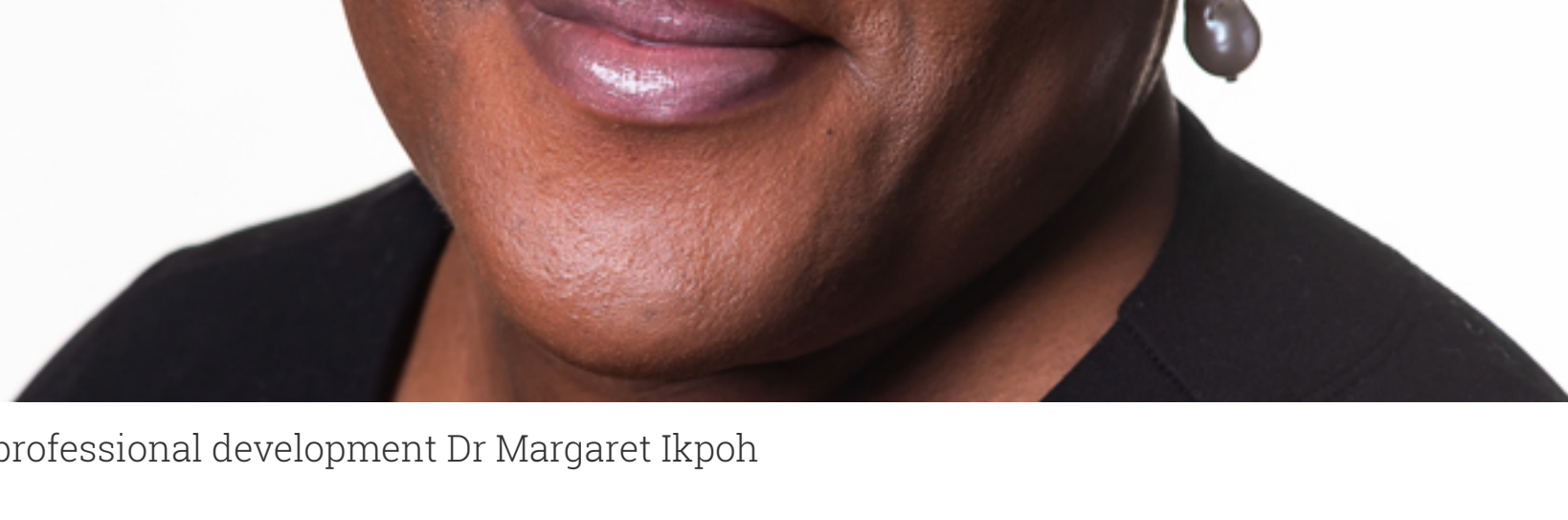
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Immigration obstacles remain for IMG GPs despite visa extension

By Kimberley Hackett on the 4 December 2023

The NHS risks losing thousands of newly-qualified GPs who are international medical graduates (IMGs) because plans to extend their visas do not go far enough, the RCGP has warned.

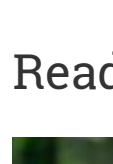


RCGP vice chair for professional development Dr Margaret Ikpoh

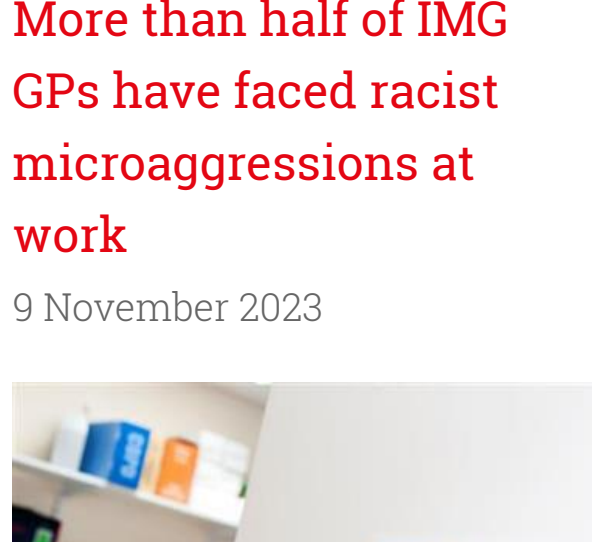
More than half of GP registrars in the England are international medical graduates (IMGs) - doctors who obtained their first medical qualification outside the UK.

The RCGP has called for these doctors to be granted permanent UK residence on completion of GP training - warning that failing to do so risks 'making working as a GP in the UK a less attractive option and losing the benefit of the investment that has been put into their training'.

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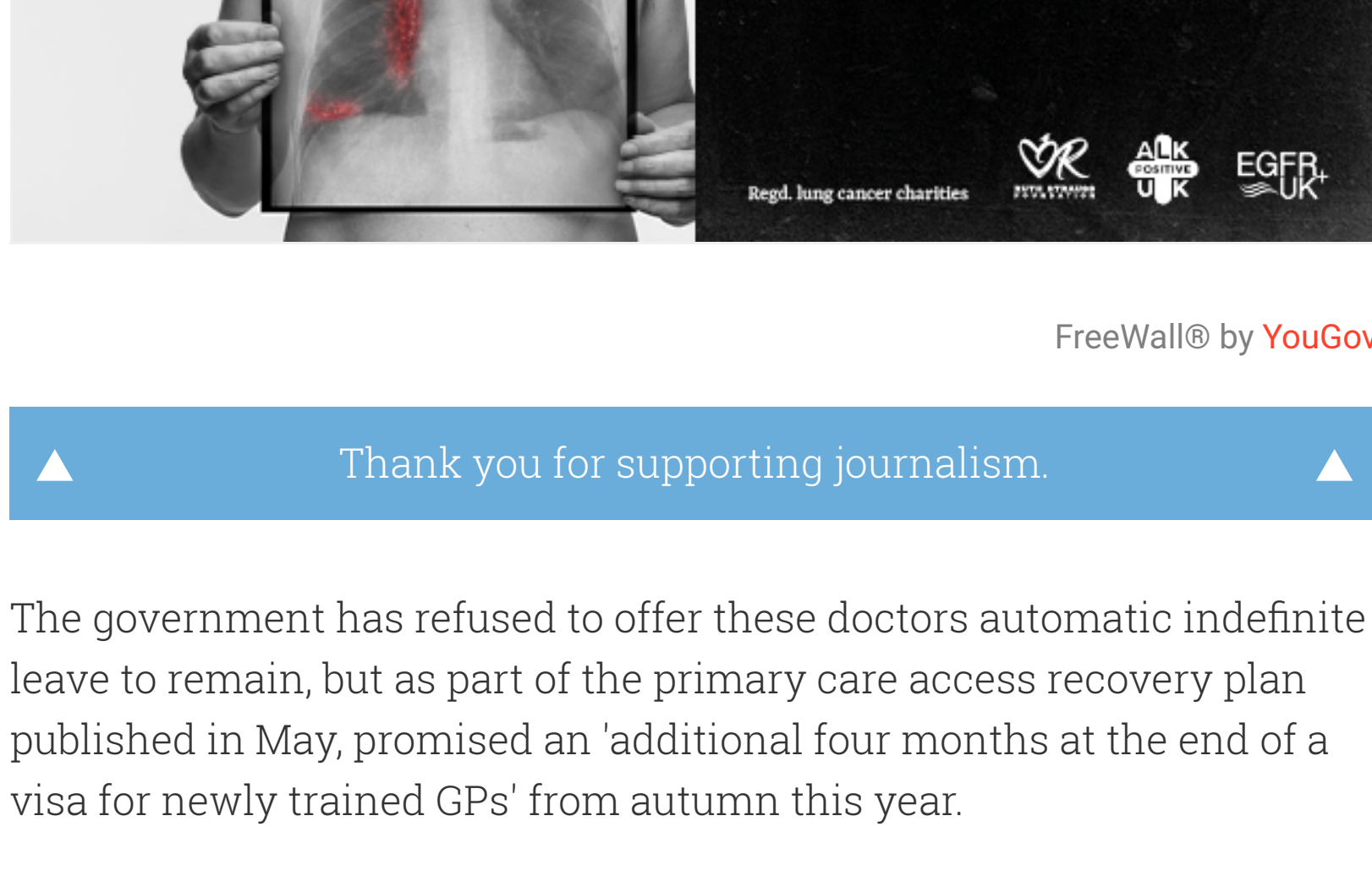
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The government has refused to offer these doctors automatic indefinite leave to remain, but as part of the primary care access recovery plan published in May, promised an 'additional four months at the end of a visa for newly trained GPs' from autumn this year.

GP visa extension

The DHSC has confirmed the extended visa option was implemented in time for the cohort of GPs who completed training this summer - but the process is not automatic.

RCGP vice chair for professional development and standards Dr Margaret Ikpoh told *GPonline* that further changes were needed to support newly-qualified IMG GPs who have completed UK GP training until permanent residency is on the table.

'What we've heard from members is that while the extension has helped some, it does not fully address the current immigration obstacles for others,' she said.

'They still need to find employment in a practice that offers visa sponsorship, which may require them to relocate or commute a significant distance.'

Visa sponsor

Neither the government nor NHS England know how many GP practices hold sponsorship licences - although *GPonline* understands that only a minority of practices have this status.

Dr Ikpoh criticised the government's failure to make visa extensions automatic, warning it 'adds pressure on trainees through the application process during an already highly-stressful period in their training, when they are likely facing exams'.

She added that with the current workforce crisis facing general practice, it should not be made harder for qualified GPs to find work in the UK.

Figures from NHS Digital show that **GP practices in England delivered 34.3m appointments in October this year** - 11% more than in October 2019.

Meanwhile, the fully-qualified, full-time equivalent GP workforce in England has fallen by around 2,000 compared with the September 2015 baseline from which the government promised to increase it.

Permanent residence

Dr Ikpoh called for the government to consider 'giving GP trainees from overseas the right to apply for permanent residence in the UK when they complete their training'.

She added: 'Ultimately, it will help ensure that there are enough GPs and other primary care professionals to safeguard the future of general practice and the wider NHS.'

GP training lasts three years, while training for other medical specialties lasts five years. After five years in the UK, doctors qualify for indefinite leave to remain - but this is not the case for doctors completing shorter training programmes.

The DHSC said that although it would not automate visa extensions for GP registrars who have already begun their training, it was working closely with NHS England, the Home Office and UK Visas and Immigration to ensure the process is as straightforward as possible.



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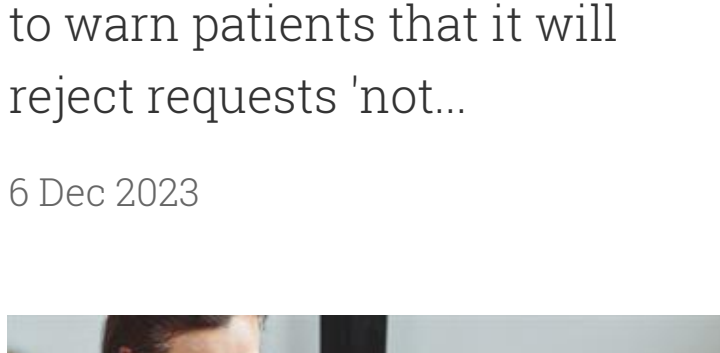
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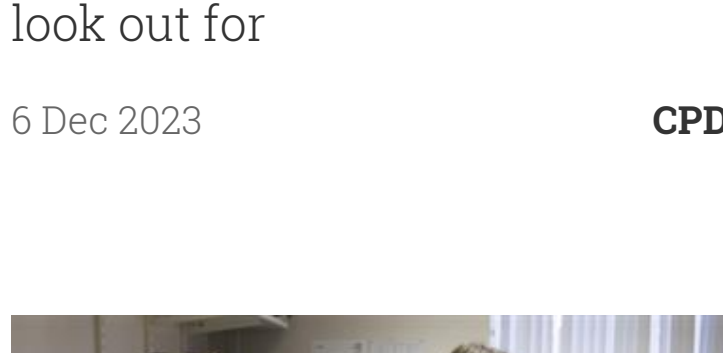
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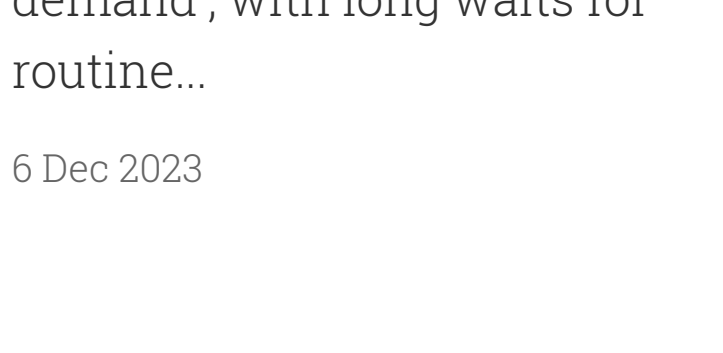


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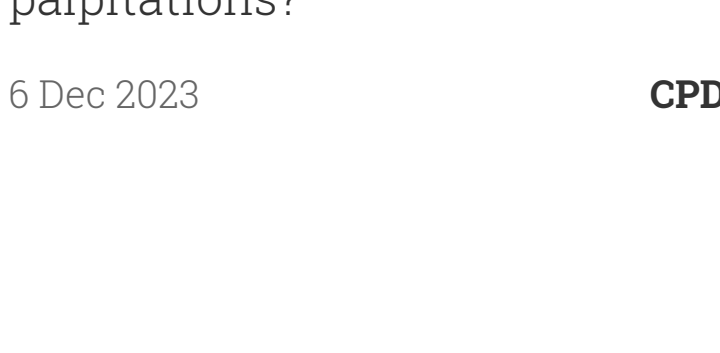
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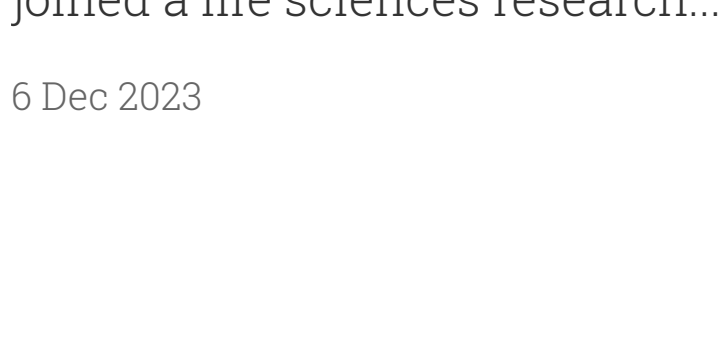


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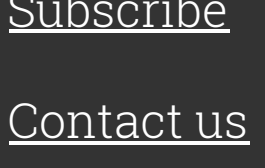
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