

Foreword

2020 has tested the resilience of the health system and those who work in it. The fortitude of the workforce has been rightly lauded, with remarkable levels of public support.

Experiences of this time have not been uniform, for patients or for the profession. But clinicians, system leaders and policymakers can all agree that coronavirus (COVID-19) has left its mark, and will continue to do so.

The picture is complex, and we're only part-way through this pandemic. But clear lessons have already emerged, and we owe it to doctors and the patients they care for to apply them.

Central amongst them must be the inequalities that persist in medicine and across society, lent a new urgency by the disproportionate toll of COVID-19 on BME health and social care workers.

This is no longer a question of gathering evidence, but of committing to action. We know that the experiences of doctors from a BME background can be sharply different from those of their white colleagues. It is now a question of what we do about it.

This work is critical – not only in the interests of justice and fairness, but because BME doctors make up a growing part of the workforce. 61% of joiners this year identify as BME, compared with 44% in 2017. Meanwhile, more international medical graduates joined the workforce this year than UK and EEA graduates combined.

This growing diversity must be accompanied by genuine inclusivity. To meet today's needs, it is not enough to recruit doctors, we also have to retain them. That means making the UK a place where doctors can develop their career and stay for the long term.

For all doctors, more must be done to make compassionate cultures a lived reality. We've seen encouraging signs, with 54% reporting that the response to the pandemic had a positive impact on sharing knowledge. But these benefits haven't been felt equally. While 68% of white doctors said there had been a positive impact on teamwork between doctors, this figure dropped to 55% for BME doctors.

This period has also reaffirmed the power of the presence of leadership. 38% of doctors said there had been a positive impact on the visibility of leaders, rising to 58% for trainees. One clear positive cited across all levels was a sense of being 'all in it together'.

We know there's a direct correlation between the environment in which a doctor works and the care their patient receives. Collaboration, communication and accessible leadership make a material difference.

In this time of uncertainty, these qualities are more important than ever. With a third of doctors reporting that the pandemic has adversely impacted their mental health, compassionate leadership must come to the fore. The emphasis on wellbeing we've seen during the pandemic must be maintained and built upon.

When we look back at 2020, there is much to be proud of. In the face of acute need, healthcare workers and system leaders have responded with innovation and resolve.

Let's seize the opportunity now to sustain and embed the good work that's been done, so we're ready for the challenges to come.



Dame Clare Marx
Chair



Charlie Massey
Chief Executive and Registrar

