

Written evidence submitted by a member of the public (MRS0332)

I am a medical registrar at a large NHS teaching hospital. I have been in this country since 2014 but originally I am from Pakistan. I am therefore a member of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community, and I definitely feel I have experienced an unequal impact as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. I believe this unequal impact relates to the protected characteristics such as: Religion/Belief, Race, and Marriage. I will explain my reasoning in this submission.

Firstly, as a Pakistani national, religion and belief plays a big part in our lives. Islam is important to all of us, but we really feel compelled to pray and ask God for assistance during difficult times such as those we are currently experiencing. Prayers in Islam are usually conducted as part of a large congregation, and we feel wholly connected when able to be with fellow Muslims in our congregation. Therefore, I feel one of the biggest impacts on a personal level is the lack of group prayer opportunities due to the decision to restrict large public gatherings. Of course, it is sensible to ban such activities, and social distancing is paramount in assisting with reducing this virus, but still I cannot help feeling disappointed and somewhat lost at being so far apart from my community during a time when I perhaps need them the most. Similarly, we have recently entered the holy month of Ramadan. This time is usually spent with friends and family, enjoying the scarce meals we are permitted once night-time falls. Indeed, it has been different this year, but I am also thankful to God that I am alive and well today.

Sadly, as evidenced in numerous reports, the vast majority of the medical professionals that have died whilst trying to save our patients have been part of the BAME community which has been attributed to our genetic make-up. I do not want to comment on the science behind this, but it is a sad day in Britain when the foreign nationals who came to serve this country are the ones who died whilst doing a job they loved and saving patients who are always their number one priority. This brings me on to the next protected characteristic of “race”. Of course, all lives are precious regardless of ethnicity, but it impacts me more on a personal level when people of my own descent are dying through no fault of their own. I assume nobody could have predicted this correlation between race and death rates, but the severity of it should not be ignored. I am sure we have all asked the question: could their deaths have been avoided through appropriate Personal Protective Equipment? Thankfully, my hospital have provided reasonable safety materials, and although I feel somewhat suffocated and claustrophobic in some of the PPE provided to us, I know that it is essential and is literally the difference between life and death for us all.

Indeed, I myself have become more concerned for my own health and safety overall. Ordinarily, I am not worried about myself and feel I am a “tough cookie” but seeing first-hand how my colleagues are affected by this really makes me evaluate my future. One good thing to come out of all of this disaster is that I have finally bit the bullet and secured life insurance. That in itself was quite a challenge and I feel brokers have drastically increased their rates to monopolise on the crisis which is not fair at all and is quite disrespectful. Similarly, I have made the sensible decision to write a will. I had been meaning to do these things for a while and would not have done any of them if this crisis had not happened, thus awkwardly I have Coronavirus to thank for something! I do feel reassured that with this added “protection” my family are safe if I do suffer an untimely demise. Of course, I hope that never happens, but it is a grim reality that I and my friends have contemplated over recent months. Nevertheless, we still put ourselves out there and fight this challenge day after

day. After all, if it wasn't for the ethnic minorities and overseas healthcare workers, the National Health Service would not be as amazing as it is today and for every unfortunate death of a frontline BAME worker, is another simply getting on with their day job to save our unfortunate patients. I am thankful for the hard work and determination of all key-workers at the moment, but for those in the BAME community, I am extra thankful due to the additional risk to our lives.

It is not only my own life I am concerned for. My anxiety around my family's health and well-being has multiplied since this pandemic. As a doctor, I am faced with a lot of complex cases and circumstances, but nothing is too much of a challenge for me. This difficult time has however made me face one of the most catastrophic nights of my career to date; and it was not related to my work or my patients. I have three young children and one night I took an alarming call from my wife that our youngest was unwell and had developed a cough. The word "cough" when related to your children is unwelcome at the best of times, but during a Covid-19 pandemic is one of the most petrifying things you could hear. On one hand I wanted to help him and be at home with my family, but on the other hand I knew I should not be around symptomatic family members. I therefore took the difficult decision to arrange hotel accommodation which the hospital were kindly facilitating. This brings me on to the next characteristic of "marriage" as I have not felt pressure on my relationship until this moment. I had never been apart from my wife in the ten years since our nuptials, and now it was not an argument or an affair that was tearing us apart, but an inanimate object: Covid-19. I never would have anticipated this happening and I felt so helpless at that time. Here I was saving strangers, but I was not able to help my own child. Indeed, finding medication for him during this period proved to be impossible too but an amazing friend managed to source some Calpol sachets that were much appreciated. Thankfully, he made a full recovery and we were reunited eventually, and I hug him a little tighter each day and thank God that we are alive and well to see this day.

I would like to briefly mention my hotel experience, which as a man of little luxuries, was a new phenomenon to me. On initial arrival, the service was amazing and I enjoyed a hot breakfast every morning which was most welcome after a long night shift. Alas, one morning this all changed. I was presented with a brown paper bag. Attached to this brown paper bag was a colourful sign: "I am the best" and inside the brown paper bag was a box of "goodies" – cold goodies – that were expected to provide sufficient subsistence. This was a lovely gesture with the sign and all – but where were my poached eggs and Coco Pops? I felt somewhat neglected and very deflated. I had just returned from a busy night shift and was looking forward to a nice hot breakfast, so to be presented with this was a bit of a kick in the teeth really! Therefore, I took it upon myself to query with the hotel management as to why they had changed their breakfast situation. I was met with those three words that have come to haunt me in all aspects of life: "Due to Coronavirus..." and came to realise that this would be the excuse for everything now. Nevertheless, I am grateful to even be given the opportunity to stay in a hotel as I am sure not every hospital would offer such initiatives, and I guess those cold cereal bars did come in handy when I got a bit hypoglycaemic at times...

Hypoglycaemia brings me back to my clinical work and the adapted rota we find ourselves on currently. Since 27th March 2020 we have worked this temporary work pattern of four days on followed by four days off, which has proved to be gruelling. I have never felt exhaustion like it, and this is coming from the man who did 14 night shifts in a row in 2018... As the situation thankfully improves, we find the hospital OVER-staffed to a certain extent. Never did we ever think that medical professionals would feel there are too many doctors on

a shift but miracles will never cease. All hands on deck is better than no hands on deck I assume. This is a stark cry from my other life-changing experience which is my decision to undertake additional locum shifts in our Emergency Medicine Department. Their consultants are often desperate for cover, and being the helpful (and poor) doctor I am, I was more than happy to oblige and offer my services. I was one of the first doctors to start dealing with Covid cases in our hospital, from dealing with one or two cases, and the obvious drama queens, to being well and truly inundated has been quite the experience. I have never seen anything escalate as quickly as this and it is quite terrifying, yet rewarding. It has been an eye-opener to say the least and some of these incidents will stick with me forever. It has mostly been an interesting period, but it did have its difficult times too. One of the more difficult moments was when a consultant did not like my handling of a situation, and dismissed me as “only” a locum. Without his team of amazing locums giving up their own spare time to help, there would be no Emergency Department. I felt depressed at that point: undervalued, and overworked. Of course, I am not asking for a medal but I would like some appreciation from time-to-time as I’m sure all of us at the hospital would. The arrogance of some individuals especially during a crisis never ceases to amaze me, but at the end of the day I am not here to please people, I am here to save lives and save lives I shall. Nothing gives a greater feeling of satisfaction than knowing you have saved someone who was on the brink of death.

In relation to death, and in conclusion of this submission, in spite of all the trials and tribulations that have come from being a key worker on the frontline during the biggest pandemic of our time, the most difficult struggle throughout all this turmoil has been the emotional impact of it all. A case that will haunt me forever and really made me question whether I could carry on through all of this was the time I had to tell a family of a young patient that sadly they didn’t make it. A patient with their whole life ahead of them, had sadly come to a tragic end. This literally broke me and the mental impact will always be at the back of my mind. I am sure I am not alone in this and I believe being a doctor will never be the same again. However, for every failure there is a success story, and we will never look at a mask or pair of gloves in the same way ever again... We all long for the day we can be reunited with friends and return to a normal way of life, well as “normal” as it can get for a doctor! I guess that would just be finally more than four days off... However, for now, we will continue the fight that we hope will soon be over, and extend our thanks once again to all involved but not least to those who have sadly lost their lives.

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