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GMC review into MRCGP to be led by racism expert

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The GMC's independent review into the MRCGP exam will be led by one of the UK's leading researchers into racism in the NHS but it may not be enough to stop a judicial review by international doctors groups against the RCGP, Pulse has learned.

The regulator announced that Professor Aneez Esmail, professor of general practice at the University of Manchester, will lead the review. It is due to be published in the summer, pre-empting the judicial review being carried out by the British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin against the RCGP.

His appointment has been welcomed by BAPIO and the British International Doctors Association, who have said Professor Esmail is 'absolutely the right man for the job'. However, they have warned that unless there are substantive changes to the exam, the judicial review will go ahead regardless of Professor Esmail's findings.

Professor Esmail is a prominent GP researcher, with an interest in patient safety, the treatment of complaints and racism in the medical profession. He carried out a review of the handling of complaints and transparency in the GMC.

Dr Umesh Prabhu, vice-chair of the British International Doctors Association, said: 'He is absolutely the right person and we are delighted he is the person to carry out the review.'

Dr Ramesh Mehta, the president of BAPIO, said: 'This is a positive development and it would not have happened if we didn't challenge the RCGP and GMC and decided to take legal action.'

However, he added: 'We would certainly consider the outcome of the independent enquiry. But what we are looking for is a definitive change to the flawed system of assessment. Whatever the outcome of the independent review, if there is no change to the substantive exam, we will continue to proceed with legal action.'

Niall Dickson, chief executive of the GMC, said: 'This is a critical examination for doctors wishing to become GPs and it is vital that doctors, patients and employers have confidence that it is both fair and robust. Where serious questions have been raised, as they have in this case, it is right that we should look at them. The underlying causes for different pass rates among different groups of doctors are likely to be complex, but we are determined to understand this issue, which is why, as a first step, we have commissioned this independent review of the data.'

Professor Clare Gerada, chair of the RCGP, welcomed the review and said: 'The College welcomes this independent review and we are looking to undertake further, more detailed, research into the examination later in the year.'

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