

GPs “Not Policemen for immigration service”

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The chairman of the British Medical Association (BMA) has urged the government to use “discretion” when deporting illegal immigrants requiring medical care.

Dr Hamish Meldrum has written to the home secretary, Jacqui Smith, regarding the case of Ama Sumani, a Ghanian woman who was recently deported from the UK despite needing life-saving dialysis treatment.

Dr Meldrum said that the government could have shown “more compassion and humanity” in this instance. While he acknowledged her presence in the UK was illegal, he said “the patient’s circumstances were such that she could justifiably be treated as an exceptional case”.

He added that Ms Sumani’s doctors “owed her a duty of care”, which “she desperately needed to stay alive”. “In these circumstances,” Dr Meldrum wrote, “the BMA would strongly urge the government to exercise its powers of discretion and reconsider its decision.”

The case has revealed the wider issue of medical treatment for refugees and asylum seekers. In the letter to Mrs Smith, Dr Meldrum reiterated the BMA’s position on this matter:

“We do not believe the caring role of doctors should be compromised by seeking to have them act as policemen for the immigration system, and our advice to them is clear: treat first and let others ask questions later”.