

The case for grandparents, and indefinite leave to remain

by Nitin Shrotri

A recent flare up around indefinite leave to remain rules
reminded one consultant of his own struggle

Location: International Published: Friday 5 February 2021



The Twitter storm last Saturday evening took me slightly
aback: a few hundred tweets on ‘indefinite leave to remain’.

I had been aware of the issue for a little while but not of the depth of feeling attached to it.

It immediately took me back just over 20 years. I already had ILR (indefinite leave to remain) in the UK but had achieved another landmark and was celebrating passing my FRCS urology exams. The phone rang. It was a call from India.

My father, pictured above with me, told me of a sudden onset of symptoms as he was doing some clearing up around the home. As a urologist, I knew straight away what was happening – he had cancer, and it was advanced; it had spread all over his body.

My fears proved correct. A blood test result next day showed sky-high levels of the tumour marker. Five thousand miles away, I was torn. What could I do sitting here? What should I do? In less than a week, I flew to India. Within a fortnight, he and my mother were flying back with me to the UK.

In those days, all visitors could get multiple entry visas, as we still do. But then, they were relatively inexpensive, and easy to obtain. As they were clearly affordable, it meant that my retired parents could fly over and live with us for a few months at a time as visitors to the UK.

But now my father was probably too ill to fly back and forth. I racked my brains – what could I do? As the only son in an Indian family, tradition meant that I look after my parents in the twilight of their lives – the option of social care didn't

exist. The guilt of deserting one's ageing parents always weighs on every immigrant's mind.

At the suggestion of a friend and mentor, who thought I should ask for ILR for my parents, I wrote to my then MP, the unforgettable Ann Widdecombe.

As a formidable constituency MP at that time, once she was convinced about the merits of a case there was no stopping her and, she acted swiftly and effectively.

My parents were granted ILR. It made my life so much easier. It meant I could look after my parents because I could pop into their room every morning to make sure my father was well and go to work without worry or guilt.

Importantly, it also meant I could continue to give 100% to my job: work all the hours needed and focus on looking after my patients. Apart from NHS treatment which commonwealth citizens are entitled to any way in the UK, they claimed no benefits, nothing at all. I was happy to take responsibility for their wellbeing and day to day care.

It was fabulous for my children, for me, and for my parents. My father would often walk them to school, most days, once he had recovered from the initial illness. The love between grandparent and grandchild is truly sublime and unselfish.

It was an experience that enriched our lives as a family. My parents would look after the children when my wife and I went to work our long hours in the NHS. We had peace of

mind that the children were cared for by family. Sometimes my mother would cook us my favourite childhood dishes – so comforting for the mind as well as the stomach.

Of course, with many more under one roof, we had our moments. But overall, I would not want to change anything that happened. My father lived for eight years, till he passed away, with us by his side. I have the huge comfort of being allowed to look after my parents as they aged. I am so grateful for that, to the authorities, and my wife too.

My experience makes my heart reach out to the thousands of NHS workers, who would love to consider the option of having their parents live with them. It would be hugely welcome – for one, it would help with childcare. For our children, the coming generation, it would be an enriching experience.

To all those who come from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and the rest of the world, it could help put their minds at rest, not having to worry about their older family members at home, and at no real extra cost to the Government.

I am aware that the BMA is working closely with other organisations like BAPIO, BIDA, APPNE and the Royal Colleges to call for the stringent immigration rules on bringing over adult dependent relatives, to be scrapped. It is unnecessarily burdensome and difficult, and removing this rule will be hugely welcomed amongst international doctors.

Furthermore, I am delighted to join BMA's calls for automatic ILR for doctors, who are already on the route to settlement in the UK. This will go a long way, and make our doctors feel valued and cared for.

Society, especially our foreign NHS workers could do with some pampering in these unbelievably cruel and hard times from grandparental love, for after all, it is all types of love, that make the world go round.

I would love if the government could offer this gesture as an acknowledgement of their appreciation. A little bit of empathy will go a very long way.

Nitin Shrotri is a consultant urologist in East Kent

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