

Access to NHS Treatment

Access to NHS treatment for UK citizens working abroad

In April 2015 there was a change in the regulations about NHS charges for UK citizens working abroad. Primary care remains free for everyone but eligibility for free NHS secondary care in England is now based solely on whether or not a person is 'Ordinarily Resident' in UK. The definition of Ordinary Residence being used in these Regulations is as follows:

'Living lawfully in the United Kingdom, voluntarily and for settled purposes as part of the regular order of their life for the time being.'

What does Ordinary Residence mean?

Whether or not a patient is Ordinarily Resident (OR) is determined in the light of the circumstances of each individual patient. Overseas Visitor Managers in hospitals are accustomed to establishing a person's ordinary residence status, and a [tool](#) has been developed to assist them in applying the new regulations. This gives an indication of the sort of factors that will be taken into account when assessing OR.

A person can be absent from the UK for a temporary or finite period and still be ordinarily resident here. Those acting as missionaries or volunteers overseas, and their family members, may not intend to live overseas indefinitely, and may maintain a base in the UK to which they return regularly or periodically, including, but not exclusively, between assignments. This base may be their own home or the home of close friends or family. However it is likely that the longer someone is overseas, the more difficult it may be to prove OR.

Global Connections have produced an excellent [briefing](#) page on this issue, with a useful list of [FAQs](#) to download and also some [guidance](#) to help sending agencies and individuals navigate the Ordinary Residence test.

What does this mean for doctors working overseas?

Regulations for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are slightly different. Links to these regulations can be found on the Global Connections [page](#).

- Access to primary care services (eg GP services, dental practices, community pharmacists, walk-in centres, NHS 111, and high street optometrists) remains free for everyone - apart from the usual charges that apply to NHS patients, such as prescription charges and eye tests.

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- The length of time that a patient is intending to reside in an area dictates whether they are registered as a temporary or permanent patient. Patients should be offered the option of registering as a temporary resident if they are resident in the practice area for more than 24 hours but less than 3 months.
- Access to the Emergency Department (A&E) is free to all and will include tests and treatment while someone is still under the overall care of A&E.
- Once care is handed over to another team by hospital admission or follow-up outpatient care, it becomes chargeable for anyone not deemed to be OR.
- If you are deemed to be OR, you will be entitled to secondary NHS care (ie hospital care) during your stays in UK.
- If you return home at the end of a contract overseas (or because of illness) and have no firm plan to go abroad again, you are immediately OR and eligible to free treatment from the moment you arrive.
- Your OR status will be assessed at the point of delivery of care ie the hospital to which you have been referred. This is the role of the Overseas Visitors Manager.
- If you are not deemed to be OR, you will be charged 150% of the normal cost of any secondary health treatment.
- There are certain [diseases](#) for which no charge is made for diagnosis or treatment.

Private insurance

If you think you are unlikely to be deemed OR, you may want to consider taking out private health insurance. Global Connections has negotiated a health insurance [programme](#) for mission agencies: if you are supported by an organisation, they might wish to consider joining the scheme.