

# International Health Care Workers, The Irish Perspective.

## **Abstract**

Irish health service is heavily reliant on overseas health care workers. Overseas qualified doctors have served in the Irish hospitals for more than quarter of a century. The numbers working here have increased significantly over the past ten years. One main reason for this has been the reliance of the hospital system to provide bulk of clinical care by doctors in post graduate training. The number of home graduates trained by five Irish medical schools had been capped at 305 since 1979 by the Irish Government. The Irish brain drain is also a factor as almost half of the home graduates leave Ireland within five years of graduation. This is mainly due to the lack of recognised training places and difficulties with seamless career progression. A Career Tracking Study<sup>1</sup> on the career choices of doctors from two graduation years 1994 and 1999 confirmed that medical emigration from Ireland is much higher than other countries such as the UK. Over 40% of respondents were working abroad at the time of the study and a significant percentage of these were in training. It is likely that this trend will continue as almost 60% of the 1999 graduates have indicated that they intend to go abroad. In another study 93% of interns between March and June 2003 indicated they would go abroad in the future<sup>2</sup>. There is some evidence of a significant level of long-term or permanent emigration, e.g. a recent study of the 1978 graduates showed that 25 years after graduation 25% were still working overseas<sup>3</sup>.

The vacancies left in the system are filled by doctors from of Non EU countries. On one hand it gives them exposure and training to very high standards of clinical practice but on the other, their career progression slows down significantly. This is due to the bottlenecks in the system for career progression as the number of consultant appointments is regulated by the government. It is important to note that majority of Non EU graduates would return to their native countries, bringing with them wealth of experience gained in the Irish system. This system has served the Irish Hospital service well in terms of continuous supply of the brightest and the best from other systems however what effects it had on the systems of the supplying countries is not known to us.

In the recent years the hospitals have been recruiting actively overseas for nurses to work in Ireland. In case of overseas doctors, there is an element of post graduate training and possibility of eventual return to native country; however the nursing appointments are purely for provision of service. One can draw conclusions, that better training, better career opportunities and working conditions are the main driving forces for such migratory patterns.

## References:

- 1 A Career Tracking Study entitled "Factors affecting Career Choices and Retention of Irish Medical Graduates"  
Commissioned by the MET Group, and undertaken by the Department of Public Health Medicine and Epidemiology, University College Dublin. 2005 [www.dohc.ie/publications/buttimer](http://www.dohc.ie/publications/buttimer) report
- 2 Working And Training As An Intern: A National Survey of Irish Interns; Finucane P and O'Dowd T; Medical Teacher, March 2005, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 107-113
- 3 Medical Graduates of the National University of Ireland in 1978: Who and where are they?; Finucane, Loftus, O'Callaghan; Irish Medical Journal, January 2005, Vol. 98, No. 1; [www.imj.ie](http://www.imj.ie)