



## Foreign trained MDs: ethical issue with no easy solution

CBC.CA News

Section: Canada

Broadcast Date: Friday, February 2, 2007

Time: Thu February 01 11:34:13 2007 EST

Network: CBC

There is an ethical issue with Canada recruiting doctors from developing countries, but there are no easy answers, a report published Thursday says.

The **Canadian Policy Research Networks** said about 23 per cent of the doctors nationally - 55 per cent in Saskatchewan - were trained outside Canada.

When those doctors come from developing countries, they undermine the local health-care system and bring their expensive training to a richer country from a poorer one.

"It is inappropriate for nations as relatively wealthy as Canada to deal with their own domestic health human resource shortages and maldistribution by relying on the immigration of health professionals from developing countries," the report said.

The South African High Commissioner to Canada agreed in 2001, criticizing Canada because of the number of South African physicians leaving the country.

There were an estimated 1,500 South African doctors in Canada in 2001, and almost one in five of Saskatchewan's 1,530 doctors got their first medical degree in South Africa.

Medical immigrants' picture muddy

But it's hard to address the issue because it's not clear who is responsible, or even what is actually happening in terms of medical immigrants, said the report, entitled *Ethical Recruitment of Internationally Educated Health Professionals: Lessons from Abroad and Options for Canada*.

"Any decision about how to address these issues is undercut by significant disagreement as to how best to resolve the issue, who is responsible for taking action, and even on what is going on 'down on the ground' when it comes to movement of people across borders."

Doctors who come to Canada from developing countries, mainly in Asia and Africa, may be responding to Canadian campaigns, fleeing violence or turmoil, following people they know who have already emigrated and speak well of Canada, or moving to make better money.

While there's evidence that Canadian employers advertised jobs in South African medical journals, there are also indications that many doctors chose Canada through word-of-mouth recommendations.

Moreover, doctors have the right to choose where to go. As Newfoundland doctor Syed Peer said, "It's a freedom of choice. Whoever wants to come, I think he should be able to come."

Peer moved to Newfoundland more than 25 years ago from India to work in a system with higher standards and better working conditions.

The report said that critics are wrong to "simply decry the 'poaching' of health professionals" because they're ignoring

the mixed and complicated motives that lead people to move.

That mix of motives makes it hard to determine a response. However, the report said that over the longer term, Canada can educate more of the health-care professionals it needs.

"Better planning at all levels - from the institution to the regional health authority to the province to the national level - can only help reduce the tendency to look to developing nations for human resources," the report said, noting that domestic policy decisions have contributed to the shortages.

Individual provinces, which do most medical hiring, could adopt codes of conduct governing the hiring of health-care professionals. But even that's a problem because hospitals and underserved communities would balk, and provincial governments would be accused of denying health care to residents.

The study recommends the provinces begin to address the issue.

© 2007 CBC. All Rights Reserved.

Idnumber: 200702020031  
Length: 537 words