INCENTIVES BEYOND SALARY ARE KEY TO ATTRACT HEALTH WORKERS TO RURAL AREAS, STUDIES SHOW

GENEVA – Health workers who take jobs in remote and rural areas do it for more than just the money, according to research published in this month’s issue of the international public health journal, the Bulletin of the World Health Organization.

A well-equipped working environment and opportunities for career development are considered just as important as a higher salary in influencing medical students to work in rural jobs, according to a study held in Ghana.

"Our study also found differences in gender preferences," says co-author Dr Margaret E. Kruk, from the School of Public Health at the University of Michigan in the United States of America. "Female students are more likely to be attracted to jobs that have supportive management, while men are influenced by superior housing."

Several research papers published in this issue of the Bulletin of the World Health Organization show that health workers are attracted by different incentives depending on the country and the individual's background. A study of nursing graduates found that better educational opportunities and rural allowances appeal to nurses in Kenya and South Africa, while nurses in Thailand are more interested in rural jobs that provide good health insurance.

Half the world's population lives in rural areas but is served by only one quarter of the world's doctors, according to Dr Manuel Dayrit, Director of the Department of Human Resources for Health at the World Health Organization.

"While we may still have heroes who unselfishly opt to serve in poor areas, there are fewer and fewer of them who stay to do so," says Dr Dayrit. "More research is needed in order to understand why health workers choose to work in these areas and what will assist them to stay there."

The Bulletin of the World Health Organization is one of the world's leading public health journals. It is the flagship periodical of the World Health Organization (WHO), with a special focus on developing countries. Articles are peer-reviewed and are independent of WHO guidelines.
Further items in this month's special theme issue on health workforce retention in remote and rural areas include:

- Cuba trains doctors for developing countries.
- How are some countries dealing with the global shortage of nurses?
- Compulsory service to place health workers in remote areas: does it work?
- A Dutch-supported foundation provides health cover for farmers in Nigeria.
- Medical schools play an important role in encouraging rural practice.
- Measuring the effectiveness of policies to attract and keep health workers.

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