Research Responses to Doctor Emigration from Ireland

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MEDICAL WORKFORCE IRELAND
20,000 Doctors Registered

Ireland fails to retain the doctors it trains
Although Ireland now produces 727 doctors per year
(which should be enough to staff the system), but it loses many of those doctors to emigration

1881 verifications were issued to doctors in Ireland in 2015

HOW MANY EMIGRANT DOCTORS RETURN?

ROUTE 1
1/3 of New Entrants in 2015
ATTEND IRISH MEDICAL SCHOOL
Complete a basic medical qualification
Complete an internship
JOIN THE IRISH MEDICAL REGISTER

ROUTE 2
2/3 of New Entrants in 2015
INTERNATIONALLY TRAINED DOCTORS (IMGS)
Almost 40% of Ireland’s doctors are IMGs
Almost 80% of non-training NCHDs are IMGs
These doctors come from Pakistan, Sudan, the UK, South Africa, Romania

ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS OF IRELAND
Ireland’s Future Medical Workforce

• Current workforce situation is unsustainable

• How might this change?

• How might Ireland’s future medical workforce look if aligned with WHO Global Code of Practice and the Global Strategy 2030?

  • Halve dependency on internationally trained doctors: 20% of all doctors (still high)

  • Improve retention of Irish trained doctors:
    • Improve working conditions, clearer career progression, challenge culture of medical migration
    • Increase circular migration opportunities for Irish trained doctors (Dr. Richard Steevens’ Scholarship)
    • Increase fellowship opportunities in Ireland
How Can Research Respond?

• By generating information on medical emigration to inform evidence based policy making:
  
  • Providing data on doctor emigration and return
  
  • Giving doctors a voice (emigrants and non-emigrants):
    • Why do doctors emigrate? Why do they stay?
    • Do they plan to return?
    • And (most importantly) do they actually return?
    • What might encourage doctor retention/return?
  
  • Collaborating internationally to facilitate the sharing of data and of best practice
  
  • Collaborating with policy makers to ‘translate data into effective workforce policies and planning’ (WHO, 2010)
How Can Research Respond?

• By developing an alternative vision for the medical workforce
  • Highlight the (urgent) need for change
  • Evaluate ongoing policy interventions (successful? unsuccessful?)
  • Inform choice of policy levers to promote retention/return
Research Findings on Doctor Emigration

• Irish health system has adapted to high levels of doctor emigration via a high reliance on IMG doctors

• Ireland has been replacing the doctors in the system rather than changing the system itself

• Doctors emigrate to access better working conditions, progression pathways and better practice environments

• The longer emigrant doctors spend in the destination country, the less likely they are to return

• Health system reform is necessary to encourage emigrant doctors to return
Hospital Doctor Retention and Motivation

• My next research project, recently funded by the HRB focuses on hospital doctor retention and motivation.

• How can we change the health system at a workplace level to better motivate and retain hospital doctors?

• How can we ensure that Irish-trained doctors no longer need to emigrate to access excellent workplaces?

‘When I got to Australia I immediately loved it. I loved the way the senior medical staff were friendly and helpful and encouraging and present on the floor (ED) . . . I felt appreciated and could see a clear career path’ (Humphries et al. 2015).

• How can we better motivate our doctors so that they want to remain or to return to practice in Ireland?
In conclusion

• Health workforce research can:
  
  • Enable a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of doctor emigration
  
  • Continually draw attention to the workforce challenges facing the Irish health system
  
  • Inform policy responses to help Ireland move towards a more sustainable medical workforce by 2030
‘Making systems work is the great task of my generation of physicians and scientists. But I would go further and say that making systems work . . . . is the great task of our generation as a whole’

(Atul Gawande, 2012)
Thanks and Contact

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- Hospital Doctor Retention and Motivation Project 2018-21 (HRB)

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