

**The Impact of Global Nurse Migration on Health Services Delivery**

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Global nurse migration has become a major phenomenon, impacting health service delivery in both developed and developing countries. The phenomenon has created a global labor market for health professionals and fueled international recruitment. International migration and recruitment are viewed as solutions to staffing shortages for some countries and as exacerbating problems for others. As a result, migration and recruitment have become dominant features of the international health policy debate.

The issues surrounding nursing shortages and global nurse migration are inextricably linked. The shortage of practicing nurses worldwide has led to aggressive recruiting by healthcare employers in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries. Foreign-educated healthcare professionals represent more than a quarter of the medical and nursing work forces of Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2002).

The impact of global nurse migration on developed and developing countries is dramatic. For instance, in the Caribbean, even a minor reduction in available nurses results in a reduction of healthcare services regionally (Yan, 2006). In the Philippines, an average of 2,600 people leave daily for overseas work in the healthcare sector (Sison, 2002). In parts of the United Kingdom and the United States, it is not unusual to find that internationally recruited nurses make up 60% to 70% of the total number of employed nurses in a given health facility (Ball & Pike, 2004).

Nurses who migrate and work in receiving countries gain valuable experience and opportunity. Sending countries should encourage them to return to their home country after this experience to share the knowledge gained (Keatings, 2006). Around the world, public officials often have short-term vision, driven largely by election cycles or other political considerations. Public officials need to understand the long-term implications of their decisions to ensure that nursing capacity is sufficient for adequate care (Outlon, 2006).

Nurses are being drawn to the United States and other developed nations in unprecedented numbers. In the United States, 12% of nurses and 22% of physicians are foreign born. Although the United States has almost 7 million nurses and 800,000 physicians, representing almost half of all nurses and physicians among the English-speaking countries (Coopers & Aiken, 2006), the mass migration of nurses to the United States is not solving America's nursing shortage.

It is interesting to note other country-specific experiences in addressing the effects and challenges of migration on nurses and health systems. For example, in 2003, Canada had approximately 4,000 international educated nurse applicants, of which only about one third became licensed to practice. It was devastating to these nurse applicants to learn that their education was not equivalent and that their language fluency, in either English or French, was insufficient to ensure patient safety. Canada is taking measures to improve the success rate of these individuals (Jeans, 2006).

Nurses born overseas need supportive policies and acceptable working conditions, or they simply will not stay in their adopted country (H. Catton, personal communications September 12, 2005). If countries become better at retaining the nurses they already have, it will minimize the cost and difficulty in recruiting new nurses. The onus is on the employer to address the retention problem and issues such as working hours, continuing education, and clear career paths (Buchan, 2006).

Countries that receive significant numbers of internationally educated nurses employ a variety of regulatory approaches to attempt to ensure that nurses are prepared to practice competently and safely in new and often unfamiliar health systems and cultures (Kingma, 2006). In the United States, requirements include meeting state regulatory requirements to practice as a registered nurse, including sitting successfully for the licensure examination.

In May 2005, the International Centre on Nurse Migration ([www.intlnursemigration.org](http://www.intlnursemigration.org)) was created by CGFNS International and the International Council of Nurses (ICN). The goal of the International Centre on Nurse Migration is to facilitate safe patient care and positive practice environments for nurse migrants worldwide. With its mission to be the global resource for nurse migration, the Centre promotes, collects, creates, and disseminates data; tracks trends and patterns of global, healthcare workforce migration; analyzes current policy and generates new policy where needed; acts as a resource center; and shares consultation and expert advice on nurse migration (Nichols & Oulton, 2005)

There is a need for a public awareness campaign on global nurse migration and management. In addition, global healthcare policy makers worldwide are calling for nations to become self-sufficient in their ability to develop their own nursing talent.