



Commonwealth Pharmaceutical Association Position Statement on the Migration of Pharmacists

In recognition of the problem across the whole of the healthcare worker sector, the Commonwealth Health Ministers have adopted the following documents at their Pre-World Health Assembly meeting in Geneva on 18 May 2003:

Commonwealth Code of Practice for the International Recruitment of Health Workers. It provides governments with a framework within which international recruitment should take place. It has been kept brief to facilitate easy interpretation and implementation.

Companion Document to the Commonwealth Code of Practice for the International recruitment of Health Workers. This provides information on definitions of terms used in the Code and detailed explanations of the concepts.

Both documents are obtainable from the CPA Secretariat. The following CPA position statement draws very heavily on these two documents.

Introduction

In many countries there is an insufficient number of pharmacists. Some countries are responding to the problem by systematically recruiting pharmacists from other countries, in particular from developing countries. Whilst this is helping some recipient countries to overcome their staff and skills shortages, it deprives source countries of knowledge, skills, and expertise for which large amounts of resources have been expended. Although this type of international recruitment provides many health workers with opportunities to develop their careers, gain valuable experience, and improve living conditions for themselves and their families, it has also resulted in negative experiences for others.

This situation is worst in rural areas where even within countries where a shortage of qualified pharmacists exists, there is a migration towards cities and urban areas.

There should always be the free migration of pharmacists throughout the world and it is not the intention of this document to hinder this freedom. The intention is to discourage the targeted recruitment of health workers from countries which are themselves experiencing shortages.

In addition, it seeks to safeguard the rights of recruits, and the conditions relating to their profession in the recruiting countries. It seeks to encourage the establishment of a framework of responsibilities between governments – and the agencies accountable to them – and the recruits. This framework balances the responsibilities of health workers to the countries in which they were trained -- whether of a legal kind, such as fulfilling contractual obligations, or of a moral kind, such as providing service to the country which had provided

their training opportunities – and the right of pharmacists to seek employment in other countries.

Safeguarding Pharmacists

Transparency should characterise any activities to recruit pharmacists from one country to another. This would normally involve an agreement between recruiting countries and the source countries. Recruiters should be transparent about the type of skills, expertise, the number of recruits, and grades being sought.

Recruiters should not seek to recruit pharmacists who have an outstanding obligation to their own country, for example, contract of service agreed to, as a condition of training. However, it is the responsibility of the recruit to disclose such information, right from the outset of indicating their interest in working outside their country of origin.

Fairness requires that recruiters provide full and accurate information to potential recruits on:

- The nature and requirements of the job that recruits are expected to perform - registration requirements (see below), ethics pertaining to the profession, indemnity protection and the medico-legal environment.
- Registration - Registration/licensure to practice is the responsibility of the relevant regulatory body in each country and the specific requirements should be made known to recruits. It is the responsibility of the recruit to understand and comply with the jurisdictional requirements around registration/licensing and education.
- Country's requirements - general condition of the country, cost of living in the country, housing and transportation arrangements, taxation arrangements and family rights eg health, education.
- Contractual requirements - hours and duties of work, general location of work, terms and conditions of employment (eg salary, leave entitlement and training), length of contract, and renewal and opt-out clause.
- Their rights - the rights to: representation by labour unions, representation by professional associations, health and safety, leave, injury or sickness pay and unemployment insurance.
- Selection procedures - The recruit, prior to signing a contract, should ensure he/she fully understands details therein and is prepared to commit him/herself to honour the contract.

Recruiters should also ensure that, while working abroad, the recruits will be protected by the same employment regulations and have the same rights as equivalent grades of staff in the receiving country, for example rates of pay, professional development and continuing education, and where possible access to training.

Strategy for Compensation/Reparation/Restitution

Further dialogue is needed between developed and developing countries on the international recruitment of staff to balance the needs of developed countries to recruit, with the needs of developing countries (experiencing shortages) to retain staff.

The capacities of countries that need to recruit staff and those which lose their skilled personnel vary significantly. Recruiters may be in a position to consider ways in which they could provide assistance to source countries. The expression of the principle of mutuality could take the form of technical assistance from recruiting countries to those from which countries are recruiting.

In addition to managing migration, Commonwealth member countries should explore and pursue additional strategies for retaining trained personnel. This would include undertaking workforce requirement studies to plans for future needs in respect of pharmacists.

Governments recruiting from other Commonwealth countries may wish to consider how to reciprocate for the advantages gained by doing so. This could include:

- Programmes to reciprocate for the recruitment of a country's pharmacists through the transfer of technology, skills and technical and financial assistance to the country concerned.
- Training programmes to enable those who return to do so with enriched value.
- Arrangements to facilitate the return of recruits (subject to application of the non-discrimination principle and to the rights of the workers concerned in accordance with immigration and other laws).

Strategies which have been used by some countries to stem the flow of international recruitment of healthcare professional include:

- Demanding compensation from departing professionals trained at their government's expense.
- Delaying departure through compulsory service.
- Increasing salaries in the public sector.
- Permitting professionals in the public sector to practice privately.
- Providing incentives such as education benefits for children, housing, transportation and day-care facilities.
- Multi-skilling and training new cadres of professionals.