



Case study – UK

Lobbying to keep the Medical Training Initiative alive

Challenge



The movement and migration of health workers is a global issue, but the negative consequences are felt most in certain developing countries. Fifty-seven countries suffer from a severe shortage of health workers and 36 of these are in Africa, which has just 3% of global health workers but bears 24% of the global burden of disease.

Opinions vary on whether incentives or sanctions should be established to encourage health workers to remain in the country where they received their original medical training. VSO's position, backed by research conducted for the 2010 'Brain Gain' report on health worker migration, is that the permanent migration of health workers from Africa to the UK and other developed countries was damaging health systems, but recognised that developing countries can benefit from health workers spending a period of time training and working in a foreign health system such as the NHS before returning to use those skills in their home country.

In the UK, the Royal College of Physicians (RCP), coordinates training, career guidance and representation for 25,000 UK-based doctors. It also leads the Medical Training Initiative (MTI). The MTI allows medical and dental graduates from developing countries to complete two-year professional training in the UK, alongside British doctors. At the end of the two years the agreement is that they will return home and in this way be able to use their experience of another country's health service, and the skills they have acquired, to contribute a new dynamic to their own system and practices.

In 2011 the UK government announced that visa conditions were going to be changed, which posed a threat to the survival of the MTI. Under the current scheme, doctors from outside the UK or the European Economic Area could reside in the UK for 24 months under a Tier 5 visa, which allows for full professional training. Under the new proposed visa conditions, this would be cut to just 12 months.

If the time-scale was reduced from two years to one the training would not be sufficient to have a positive impact on the participants, and the health systems they work for. VSO believes that such initiatives should if anything be expanded, as an effective way of tackling 'brain drain': the movement of skilled health workers away from their country of origin.

Catalyst

The VSO report from 2012, titled 'Brain Gain' presented evidence which supports

initiatives like the MTI. The scheme encapsulates what VSO's work is driven by: bringing people together to share skills. The medical professionals that make it on to the program benefit significantly from the training they receive whilst in the UK.

The RCP and VSO decided to lobby the UK government to drop its plans to reduce the visa timescale, communicating with parliamentarians and presenting evidence of the advantages of the MTI for the UK's development policy. Other British medical institutions contributed to the campaign, which lasted 18 months, with a campaign of letters to parliament, meetings with civil servants, MPs and Lords. New briefing reports were used as advocacy tools and support was won from the All Party Parliamentary Groups for Health and Development issues.

Results

In March 2012 the government announced that under the new immigration rules, the visa conditions allowing for the Medical Training Initiative to operate would be safeguarded. This allows the RCP to continue to welcome doctors and dentists from outside of the UK and the European Economic Area for two years of NHS training and experience.

In 2010 a total of 191 doctors took part in the MTI. Now that the enabling legislation has been secured it is expected that this number will rise in the coming years.

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VSO's 'Brain Gain' report on health worker migration is available to download:
http://www.vso.org.uk/Images/Brain%20Gain%20Report_FINAL%20lores1_tcm79-28845.pdf

For more information on the Royal College of Physicians visit their website:
<http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/>
Or find out more about the Medical Training Initiative:
<http://aomrc.org.uk/mti.html>