

Policy Document

Ethical Recruitment of International Medical Graduates Policy

Background

The Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) is the peak representative body of Australia's medical students. AMSA believes that all communities have the right to the best attainable health. Accordingly, AMSA advocates on issues that impact health outcomes globally.

International Medical Graduates or Overseas Trained Doctors (IMGs) are doctors who enter the Australian workforce during or after their pre-vocational years. The Australian health care system has become increasingly reliant on IMGs, despite the concerns around the ethical recruitment of these workers (1). Health Workforce Australia predicts that by 2025, Australia will need to depend on a greater supply of IMGs to fill the shortage of doctors, and the Federal government has highlighted the fact that their recruitment of IMGs is increasing to supplement the needs of Australia's rural communities (2).

In order to see this increase in IMGs, as well as other health care workers, come to fruition the Federal Government has developed an International Recruitment Strategy (IRS) in order to recruit more IMGs and deliver them to rural and remote areas (3).

At various international conferences and meetings, the Australian Government has committed to:

- Have transparent activities regarding the recruitment of international health care workers (4, 5, 6). Despite this, Australia's IRS, as well as data pertaining to the recruitment of these health care workers is confidential.
- Not to systematically recruit health care workers from developing countries (4, 6). However Australia is currently recruiting nearly two-thirds of their IMGs from countries they have agreed not to target, including India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Iran (7) (a more detailed analysis of these practices is not available due to the confidentiality of the data and the strategy).
- Move towards a self-sufficient health-workforce, where the undergraduate and postgraduate training within Australia is adequate to meet its own health workforce needs (4, 5, 6). Despite this, the HWA2025 report (1) and the 2013-14 Federal Budget (2) indicate that there is an increasing trend in the recruitment of IMGs.

This policy statement only seeks to identify the unethical targeted recruitment of IMGs to Australia through the IRS, and does not wish to restrict access to IMGs who autonomously decide to come to Australia.

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Position Statement

AMSA believes that:

1. The international recruitment of doctors should only be done in a fair and ethical manner, and that actively recruiting doctors from countries with more severe health workforce shortages is unethical.
2. IMGs play and will continue to play a crucial role in addressing medical workforce shortages, but that this should not be seen as a long-term solution to our own workforce shortage.

Policy

AMSA calls upon the Federal Government to:

1. Make the International Recruitment Strategy completely transparent, by:
 - a. allowing public access to the details of the strategy and;
 - b. performing yearly detailed analyses of Australia's targeted recruitment strategies of health care workers, specifically highlighting the regions from which overseas health care workers are actively recruited, how long those IMGs stay in Australia, and what techniques are used for this targeted recruitment.
2. Move towards a self-sufficient health-workforce, and thus reverse the trend of increasing targeted recruitment of IMGs.
 - a. Until Australia achieves such self-sufficiency, refrain from recruiting doctors from developing countries.

References

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4. Commonwealth Code of Practice for the International Recruitment of Health Workers. Adopted at the Pre-World Health Assembly Meeting of Commonwealth Health Ministers, Geneva. 2003.
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7. Parnell, S. Overseas doctor recruitment flouts regional code. The Australian 14 March 2012.

Policy Details

Name: Ethical Recruitment of International Medical Graduates Policy

Category: G - Australian Global Health

History: Adopted, 3rd Council 2013