

Brain Drain: time to apply reverse gear

The term brain drain is primarily used to indicate migration of skilled workers from one part to the other region of the world for various reasons. Historically, the phenomenon of brain drain is documented when Byzantine emigrants played an important part in renaissance of Europe in dark ages. Brain drain in healthcare sector has been a problem for developing countries. This phenomenon has raised concern worldwide due to its negative impact on healthcare system of developing countries like Pakistan. The major concern related to international migration of healthcare workers was addressed in 1940s when there was a noticeable emigration from Europe to UK and USA. Since then this trend of emigration has become a reality with changing source countries over a period of time. Currently Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are the major “donor countries” for UK, USA, Canada and Australia. The primary reasons for this brain drain are good financial packages, chance to work in a good clinical set-up, better quality of life, stable political situation and religious and ethnic drives. As mentioned above that this mass migration of healthcare professionals is predominantly from developing countries (mainly Central Asian) to developed countries and has made the situation more perplexed in the donor countries. The developing countries do spend for education and training of doctors and other healthcare professionals with a sole intent of generating skilled manpower to run healthcare system of the country. In Pakistan, situation is more perplexed due to an initial brain drain of healthcare professionals from underdeveloped areas of all provinces to major cities followed by a second wave from major cities to abroad. As anticipated, these waves of brain drains have exerted a serious impact on healthcare system of country. The training programs in Radiology across the country are facing severe shortage of trainers and this has converged the training options to few facilities in major cities. Unfortunately less experienced radiologists remain in teaching institutions and they are in charge of postgraduate teaching programs. Another impact of this brain drain is availability of limited number of specialists to public and has given a kick off to mushroom growth to quacks all over the country. The positive side of this brain drain is that these healthcare workers get fair chance of acquiring expensive skill and contribute significantly to total remittance to country but the negative side is the bleak chance of migration of these skilled workers to their own countries. The valid justifications for this negative side are poor healthcare infrastructure, limited research facilities, no tangible career structure, violence, threat to life of doctors and unsatisfactory education system for their children. It has been observed that foreign scientists from developing countries who are involved in research and development produce 4.5 more publications and 10 times more patent than their peers at home.

The brain drain from central Asia to developed countries has seriously affected the health of population and these countries must make policies to ensure good infrastructure, better research facilities, attractive service structure and above all peace and justice in their societies. Only such tangible steps could attract the healthcare professionals to their native countries and changing this brain drain into wisdom gain. We believe in Pakistan, law and order and peace conditions are the areas which need to be given priority because “peace ensures prosperity”.

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