

Health Sector Contribution
to
Knowledge Economy

Presidential Secretariat
Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition
Post Graduate Institute of Medicine (PGIM)
Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA)

April 2008

This publication is issued to mark the establishment of
Foreign Placement Coordinating Centre

This book explains the
establishment of the
FOREIGN PLACEMENT COORDINATING CENTRE
and
LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTRE
for
MEDICAL OFFICERS

Concept

Skilled Labour Exportation and Knowledge Economy

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Abbreviations

PGIM - Post Graduate Institute of Medicine

GMOA - Government Medical Officers Association

FPCC - Foreign Placement Coordinating Centre

CV - Curriculum Vitae

IELTS - International English Language Testing System

KSA - Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

UAE - United Arab Emirates

Foreword

The establishment of a Foreign Placement Coordinating Centre (FPCC) for medical officers would enhance several benefits for the medical profession and for the country in general.

With the blessings of the GMOA, the Editors highlighted the valuable concept of “skilled labour exportation” to the Executive President of Sri Lanka, who is also the Minister of Finance. Having realised the potential value of this proposal it received a high level of recognition by the government and was included in the Budget of 2005 and then again in 2007.

Subsequent to its acceptance as a government policy, Dr. P.B. Jayasundara, Secretary to the Ministry of Finance and an Economist by profession, opined that it is the fruition of the concept of “Knowledge Economy”.

Dr. Athula Kahandaliyanage, Secretary to the Ministry of Health took initiatives to implement this programme with the participation of other relevant institutions.

This programme would generate revenue that is several folds higher when compared to the current practice of exporting unskilled labour.

When foreign placements are facilitated in this manner, the current unsatisfactory situation of the overseas training component of Post Graduate medical education would also be positively addressed.

Unemployment of future medical graduates cannot be left unattended for the next generation. We being the responsible medical professionals today, need to envisage and come up with

solutions of this nature. Foreign employment is one of the best means to absorb new medical graduates and FPCC would play a vital role in this respect in the future.

This book is published to explain the concept of skilled labour exportation and the progress of implementation. Establishment of the Foreign Placement Coordinating Centre (FPCC) and the IELTS resource centre (English Language laboratory) are the two arms of implementation.

The responsibility of the FPCC would be to promote, secure and coordinate the overseas placements without disrupting the local healthcare system, while improving our existing system. The programme will bring knowledge skills of modern medicine and facilitate sharing experience in medicine, research and collaboration.

We hope all Post Graduate trainees who await the overseas component of their training will immensely benefit from this programme and further opportunities will be created for other Medical Officers to take up overseas placements for a limited time.

The support extended by various institutions and individuals including the Presidential Secretariat is highly commendable.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to everyone who helped to implement this concept and we welcome your suggestions for improvement.

Dr. Anuruddha Padeniya
Dr. Kremlin Wickramasinghe
15th April 2008

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction and concept

Skilled labour exportation is replacing unskilled labour exportation as a global trend. However, this transition is not adequately addressed in the Sri Lankan context. Sri Lanka, being a country rich in human resources, is yet to explore the possibilities of providing services of highly skilled professionals to the international labour market as a part of its sustainable economic and social development process. Our neighbour countries like India and other countries like Philippine are conquering the silicon valley of the New World in the fiercely competitive “global market”. Along with them they carry their flag and make their presence felt in the new world order. Likewise, exportation of skilled professional labour will undoubtedly enhance the image of our country in the global context. Human resource is the best asset we have in our country and if harnessed properly it has the greatest potential to pay dividends in the long run.

1.2 Initiation

A few years back, the GMOA highlighted and initiated the concept of skilled labour exportation. The GMOA concept was accepted as a National Policy and was spelt out in the Budget

speech of 2007. Under the directions given by the Presidential Secretariat, the GMOA, along with the Ministry of Health and the PGIM joined hands to implement this concept. Establishment of the FPCC and the Language Centre were the two arms of the implementation strategy.

1.3 Current progress

This publication explains the concept of skilled labour exportation and the process of implementing this concept which includes the establishment of the Foreign Placement Coordinating Centre (FPCC) and the IELTS resource centre (English Language Laboratory). It would be the responsibility of the FPCC to coordinate overseas placements without disrupting the local healthcare system.

The current mechanism has been developed as a collaborative effort of the Presidential Secretariat, the Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition, the Post Graduate Institute of Medicine (PGIM) and the Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA) in order to implement this concept and facilitate the necessary infrastructure and human resources.

National and International resource personnel have been identified and they will contribute with their knowledge and experience to achieve the FPCC goals.

2. Introduction

2.1 Current situation of labour exportation

Foreign employment is the second largest foreign income generating avenue in Sri Lanka and more than 50% of this income comes through unskilled labour exportation, mainly from housemaids employed in the Middle East. Over a million Sri Lankans are employed abroad and more than 95% of them are in Middle East. The female component of foreign employees was 59.32% of all departures in the year 2005. Most of the females who departed in the year of 2005 were housemaids, comprising 54.14% of the total female migrant workers.

The total private remittance for the year 2005 was Rupees 191,800 Million with 56% contribution from workers employed in the Middle East. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Lebanon were the major countries receiving Sri Lankan labour exportation and these countries have captured over 80% of Sri Lankan labour market.

As opposed to the situation in other countries our earnings from skilled jobs has played a lesser role so far. The professionals mainly contribute to the “brain drain” only-the issue of never returners. Most of our best software engineers, architects, scientists and academics leave for greener pastures and would not contribute much to the national coffers. The reasons for this trend are not as so much due to personal desire as explained later.

2.2 Consequences of unskilled labour exportation

While appreciating the valued financial contributions they make, unskilled labour exportation from Sri Lanka would lead to several consequences including issues of social destabilization. The Conciliation Division of the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment received 10,829 complaints in the year 2006. As medical professionals we witness the consequences through our professional work experience and through the media. It is irresponsible to continue this present means of earning foreign income at the expense of social values and stability of the family unit.

2.3 Transition from unskilled labour exportation

After realizing the dangers of these consequences, most other developing countries have adopted or are in the process of changing their national policies to export skilled labour instead of unskilled labour. While eliminating the negative aspects of unskilled labour exportation, skilled labour exportation has its own benefits. It will safeguard the welfare of the employee as employers are expected to fulfil standard obligations in skilled labour exportation. The revenue generation is several times higher and the knowledge and experience gained by the employee would be useful for the development of the country.

In addition, the workforce will be able to share and exchange the knowledge gained at international forums and would be

encouraged to develop positive attitudes through this experience. Furthermore, Sri Lanka needs to explore ways of using free education as an investment for the country. Professionals have achieved real benefits from the free education system and now in return the country would be able to make use of educated Sri Lankans as an investment.

This transition is the call of the day in Sri Lanka. GMOA initiatives in this regard are now reaching their targets.

Skilled labour comprises of professional (intellectual labour) or technically skilled people. The percentage of professional labour exportation in Sri Lanka was less than 1% in the year 2005. Although Sri Lankan statistics shows a literacy rate of more than 92%, the country is principally dependent on unskilled labour exportation, for example housemaids.

In the past Sri Lanka has not adequately explored the avenues of rendering services of highly skilled professionals in the field of health either in the professional or technical (Paramedical) categories. Increasing attention is now being given in order to promote this concept. However, most other countries in the region are far ahead., Sri Lanka will have to develop a strategy, especially with regard to the health sector in order to achieve a satisfactory outcome with wider range of benefits to all concerned parties.

2.4 Additional benefits of the programme

In addition to the financial benefits to the country, this programme will bring in several other benefits as well.

In order to maintain the local health sector on par with international standards, it is important to make necessary arrangements for doctors to improve and update their knowledge and skills regarding the new management protocols and procedural techniques. This opportunity will be immensely useful to improve attitudes, to learn about employment issues and to gain experience by working at centres in developed countries. The image of Sri Lanka and its health system will be enhanced by Sri Lankan doctors gaining employment at well recognized centres worldwide.

Undergraduate and postgraduate medical education in Sri Lanka is conducted in English and comparable with international medical curricula. However, there is still much scope for improvement. The experience and collaboration with overseas centres will be especially valuable to improve our training programmes.

Government contribution to health and education is vital for the development of any country. The Sri Lankan government spends millions to provide free medical education and this would be a major investment to obtain economic return to the country.

Health Tourism is becoming increasingly popular in Asia and it is a valuable source of foreign currency to the country. Sri Lanka is

yet to introduce Health Tourism as a national policy as this concept has not obtained the necessary political blessings. Therefore medical officers who are trained abroad through this programme would be able to contribute towards development of this field in Sri Lanka.

Revenue generation through ethical research and collaboration also needs to be addressed.

The Ministry of Health has brought up the issue of unemployment of doctors after 2010, which needs urgent attention of all stakeholders. Whilst developing and developed countries are changing their national policies in order to provide acceptable employment for all, a situation which results in unemployed medical graduates only serves to highlight the gross shortcomings in planning and policy.

The considerable problem of future unemployment of medical graduates cannot be left unattended for the next generation to solve, but needs proper planning and policy decisions to avoid dire consequences. The FPCC can address this issue positively by finding foreign placements for doctors, while continuing to absorb recent medical graduates into the healthcare system.

3. Foreign Placement Coordinating Centre

3.1 Initiation

Dr. Anuruddha Padeniya brought forth the suggestion to incorporate the concept of skilled labour exportation for the health sector and presented it with proposals to establish the FPCC and Language Centre as two important implementation arms. Furthermore, it was proposed to use this productive mechanism to resolve the current unsatisfactory status with regard to finding overseas training placements for Post Graduate trainees. This proposal was presented to the government in 2005 with the full approval and backing the GMOA general committee.

His Excellency the President Mahinada Rajapaksa took serious note of this proposal and made directions in favour its implementation.. On the directions of His Excellency, Dr P.B.Jayasundara initiated discussions on this matter and took steps to include it into the Budget speech of the 2007 (Annexure 1). Furthermore, at a meeting held on 11th August 2007, His Excellency the President has directed Health Secretary Dr Athula Kahandaliyanage to establish the FPCC (Annexure 2).

“Foreign Employment

15. In the area of foreign employment , there is a major demand for professionals such as doctors, trained nurses and quantity surveyors. To meet the demand relating to nurses, the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare and the Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition have together introduced a program through which 500 nurses are sent for foreign employment each year.....
.....
..... . It is proposed to setup an Employment Placement Coordinating Centre in order to assist foreign employment of professionals..... ”

Budget speech 2007.


2007.08.14 ප.ව.04.30 - අරලියගහ මන්දිරය

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03.	වෛද්‍යවරුන් පුහුණු ශ්‍රමිකයින් ලෙස විදේශ රටවලට යැවීම මගින් විශාල වශයෙන් විදේශ විනිමය ලංකාවට ලබා ගැනීමට හැකි වන බවට කරුණු පෙන්වා දෙන ලද අතර, මේ සම්බන්ධයෙන් සුදුසු ක්‍රම වේදයක් සකස් කර කඩිනමින් ක්‍රියාත්මක කිරීම. (මේ සඳහා සොබා ආරක්ෂණ හා පෝෂණ අමාත්‍යාංශය, මුදල් හා ක්‍රම සම්පාදන අමාත්‍යාංශය, විදේශ කටයුතු අමාත්‍යාංශය යන අමාත්‍යාංශ සම්බන්ධීකරණය කර සුදුසු ක්‍රම වේදයක් සකස් කිරීම.)	- ලේකම්, සොබා ආරක්ෂණ හා පෝෂණ අමාත්‍යාංශය
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අ.කළේ, ගාමිණී එස්.සෙනරත්
 ජනාධිපති අතිරේක ලේකම්/කාර්ය මණ්ඩල ප්‍රධානි
 ජනාධිපති ලේකම් වෙනුවට


 ජියා ලියනගේ
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3.2 Objectives

1. To arrange foreign placements for specialists and non specialist medical officers.
2. To arrange foreign placements for Post graduate trainees
3. To encourage doctors to obtain attractive relevant qualifications, enabling them to better compete for overseas placements.
4. To ensure the smooth functioning of the healthcare system in Sri Lanka, without disruption.
5. To coordinate and make recommendations with the Post Graduate Institute of Medicine, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Employment and other relevant organizations.
6. To conduct awareness programmes about the available opportunities.
7. To promote research and collaboration at national and international level in order to attract research grants to Sri Lanka.

3.3 Current progress

The location for the FPCC was identified at the National Hospital of Sri Lanka and a meeting was held on the 8th February 2008 at the Ministry of Health to finalize the implementation programme. It was decided to appoint a steering committee with representatives of all relevant organizations and to provide funds from the allocations for Post Graduate trainees. The Secretary of Health chaired this session and directions were given to supply the necessary equipment and human resources for the centre.

Member organizations of the steering committee are

1. The Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition
2. The Government Medical Officers Association
3. The Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Bureau
4. The Ministry of Labour
5. The Ministry of Higher Education
6. The Post Graduate Institute of Medicine
7. The University Grants Commission
8. The Treasury
9. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs
10. The Presidential Secretariat

A brain storming session was held among steering committee members in order to increase the awareness of the roles of each institution as well as to generate ideas on future proceedings. The contribution of each institution was recognized and additional legislative and administrative procedures were identified.

3.4 Website and Newsletter

A website and a newsletter will be launched to create awareness among the concerned parties. The website development was initiated with the Planning Unit of the Ministry of Health.

This website will serve as the main link between Sri Lankan doctors and foreign employers. The data base with the details of the Post Graduate trainees and Medical Officers who are seeking overseas employment will be developed through the website. Furthermore, this website will provide the necessary guidance and assistance for the interested parties to obtain the requirements in order to apply for overseas jobs. The current situation in various countries regarding job opportunities for doctors will be published and updated regularly.

The Newsletter will be printed quarterly and will be circulated among all the government medical institutions and other concerned parties.

4. Language Laboratory

A Language Laboratory has been planned as the next step in order to facilitate this process. This would be of great use for medical officers to prepare for IELTS and other examinations that test English as a foreign language.

A location has been identified at the National Hospital for this purpose and the proposal was approved together with the laboratory plan and equipment specifications. Tenders have been called for the development and implementation of this Rs. Eight million project which will undoubtedly result in the most sophisticated language laboratory in the country.

5. Post Graduate Training

5.1 Mechanism of PG training

Before the establishment of Post Graduate Institute of Medicine (PGIM), doctors were sent abroad to train as specialist medical officers. Therefore international exposure and standards were maintained automatically.

With the commencement of the Post Graduate scheme, the Post Graduate Institute of Medicine (PGIM) was established 25 years ago in order to develop training programmes to cater to the local needs. However, all Sri Lankan Medical Post Graduate trainees are required to undergo a period of foreign training prior to board certification. Successful candidates of the Part 1 examination are recruited to a 3 years supervised clinical training programme. The Part 2 examination is conducted in collaboration with external examiners from other countries. Successful candidates have to undergo minimum of 2 – 3 years of training at an overseas unit before applying for board certification in their respective specialties. This is part of their structured training programme and awareness regarding this situation must be created among the international community through the government mediation in order to demonstrate the value of this programme.

5.2 Importance of overseas training

The FPCC would handle the process of identifying foreign placements for the overseas component of the Post Graduate

training. Since there is a shortage of specialist doctors in Sri Lanka, it is essential to facilitate the overseas training for the post graduate doctors in order to expand the healthcare facilities. Therefore, quality overseas training for them is a national obligation and should be given high priority

5.3 Establishing links with training centres

The FPCC will work in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to mobilize overseas missions to arrange permanent training positions at recognized overseas centres. This will ensure a fixed number of training positions every year and more links will be established through government mediation.

5.4 Human Resource Development

Regular workshops will be organized to increase the awareness among medical officers and Post Graduate trainees regarding the available facilities and current situation in various countries.

Separate sessions will be organized to increase the skills necessary to apply for overseas placements such as CV writing, using online application forms and data bases, writing proposals and communication skills.

Furthermore, the FPCC will provide guidelines to referees that will ensure all required details are provided to the employer.

6. Working Arrangement and implementation

6.1 Content of the agreement

1. The foreign post belongs to the FPCC. The FPCC is in agreement with the foreign hospital to provide qualified personnel to fill the vacancy.
2. The work permit/visa shall be arranged for the employee and his or her family for a specified period of time stipulated in the agreement and shall not be extended beyond that period.
3. The contract will have the FPCC, employer and employee as interested parties.
4. An agreement shall exist between the FPCC and the employer to employ the said employee for agreed period.
5. The employer should terminate the employment of said employee at the end of the specified contract period.
6. The FPCC will provide appropriately trained personnel to continuously man the said post.
7. The employees will be provided with the said post on the agreement that they shall send at least 50% of their gross earnings to a locally maintained account in their name and are free to use/invest this at their will on their return to Sri Lanka.

6.2 Leave

A mechanism will be developed to give no pay leave for doctors to take overseas appointments without disrupting the smooth functioning of the local health system.

Leave will be granted upon confirmation of the overseas job opportunity for a limited time period.

6.3 Allocation of placements and Visa

The FPCC will make direct arrangements with the overseas institutions and forward the details of the potential candidates to the employer. Once these vacancies are confirmed an agreement will be signed with the FPCC for a certain period of time and a blanket visa will be arranged for the particular job under FPCC. Therefore we can ensure the return of the Medical Officers at the end of this placement and new candidates will be appointed to replace them.

The FPCC will provide with necessary guidance and documents to obtain visa to enter the relevant country.

7. Strengths, Issues and Challenges

7.1 Strengths of the programme

The Sri Lankan health sector consists of various categories which provide medical officers with a unique opportunity to obtain valuable and varied clinical experience. Their ability to work under stressful situations with a large number of patients has been commended by many local and international senior professionals, and this is an advantage when compared to competitors from other countries in the region.

Sri Lanka is a developing country (GDP USD 1300 per capita) with minimal investment in the health sector. In spite of this, due to the commitment and expertise of healthcare workers the health sector has been able to achieve very high standards. This is reflected in the impressive health statistics which are comparable with developed countries. (E.g. Maternal Mortality Rate is 3 per 10,000 live births. Neonatal Mortality Rate is 9.5 per 10,000 live births; Life expectancy is 72 years for males and 74 years for females, etc).

As the principal provider of healthcare services, the government has an excellent infrastructure in both the curative and preventive sectors of healthcare. The Curative system spans from central dispensaries providing primary healthcare to teaching and tertiary level hospitals including the National Hospital of Sri Lanka.

It is evident that the capability of Sri Lankan doctors to implement effective health interventions and their clinical skills are already on par with international standards. Therefore these doctors would be ready to take up foreign placements with minimal preparation and delay.

Many Sri Lankans have left the country for more lucrative employment overseas and there is no means to retrieve their valuable services. However, through this programme opportunity will be given for doctors to work abroad for a limited period of time while they remain attached to the Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka. This is a timely strategy that will not only improve the training and career prospects of Sri Lankan doctors, but reduce the brain-drain as well

As all specialist medical officers have been trained abroad their overseas contacts and resources could be utilized to make this programme a success.

Therefore the steering committee of the FPCC requests all Sri Lankans, including medical professionals who are able to contribute to extend their services as a resource person of this programme

7.2 Issues and Challenges

Competition from other countries has been identified as one of the main threats to this programme. Steps have been outlined to improve the quality of applicants from Sri Lanka by providing them with the necessary training in related fields. It is necessary to arrange facilities to train our Medical Officers in information technology and to help them qualify in English language examinations and Medical Council Registration examinations of other countries. Adequate funding resources should be available to provide these facilities continuously to ensure the sustainability of the programme.

This programme has been planned to have the least possible impact on the smooth functioning of the Sri Lankan healthcare system. A mechanism should be developed to grant leave and release medical officers in a manner that minimally affects the activities at the healthcare institute where they are currently employed.

Steps should be taken to increase awareness regarding this programme among Sri Lankan doctors and to provide training and of the facilities available at FPCC and its website.

8. Impact on Research and Collaboration

It is important to promote a research culture among medical professionals in this country. International level collaboration should be established with well recognised foreign research centres in order to develop and maintain the quality of research in Sri Lanka.

A large amount of foreign currency will be generated as research grants and Sri Lankan medical professionals will have an excellent opportunity to improve their research skills and experience in collaboration with renowned international centres.

The FPCC will explore opportunities to promote collaboration for research and training with overseas centres. Sri Lankan centres can take the responsibility of providing training in areas such as Tropical Medicine, Trauma Care and Paediatric Cardiology under mutual exchange programmes.

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