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Recruiting foreign-trained professionals

The editorial by Amir Attaran and Roderick Walker about Shoppers Drug Mart's practice of recruiting pharmacists from South Africa¹ raises an important moral point, but in my view the authors' argument is seriously flawed. As a family physician trained in South Africa, I can assure readers that the recruitment of South African physicians to Canada is often far more active than the "passive enticement of job advertisements" mentioned by Attaran and Walker.

I was recruited with paid airfare and travel costs, assistance with immigration, a lucrative contract with free housing and an income guarantee. Hundreds of other South African physicians in Saskatchewan and Alberta have also been enticed to come to Canada. When I was in a practice in small-town Saskatchewan, I in turn travelled to South Africa twice to recruit physicians to join my Canadian practice. The Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region recently went on recruitment drives to the United Kingdom and to the Phillipines and proudly announced its successes in the local newspaper.

The fact that Shoppers Drug Mart poaches pharmacists on a bigger scale and in a more businesslike way makes its recruiting efforts no more wrong than efforts to recruit physicians like the ones I have mentioned. If Attaran and Walker want to take the moral high ground then they have to concede that poaching medical professionals in any way is wrong, whether it is by

big business or by smaller players such as individual physicians or health districts.

John C.B. Morris MB ChB

Family physician, Gardiner Park Medical Clinic, Regina, Sask.

Competing interests: None declared.

REFERENCE

1. Attaran A, Walker RB. Shoppers Drug Mart or Poachers Drug Mart? *CMAJ* 2008;178:265-6.

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Truly democratic countries recognize the right of their citizens to seek their fortune wherever they wish. However, in most instances, health care professionals are educated at great expense to their country of origin. One way of minimizing the negative effect of brain drain would be to require health care professionals who move to another country to reimburse their country of origin the amount by which their education was subsidized by the state. Health care professionals who work in their country's public health care system before leaving could be given credit for each year worked; after a decade or so their subsidy balance would be zero.

Requiring health care professionals to reimburse their country of origin for their education would allow that country to train more professionals; in effect, the country would become an educational resource for the world. Countries such as Canada that receive foreign-trained professionals could refuse entry to anyone who could not provide proof of payment. Canada would also benefit from such a system in that it would be reimbursed by Canadian-trained professionals who move elsewhere.

Gerald J.M. Tevaarwerk MD

Professor Emeritus, University of Western Ontario, Victoria, BC

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Involving physicians in MedsCheck

I completely agree with Shawn Tracy and Ross Upshur that physicians should become more involved in MedsCheck,¹ a program in which Ontario patients with chronic diseases who take 3 or more prescription medications daily can have a free yearly consultation with a pharmacist. I also agree that it would be worthwhile to immediately submit the MedsCheck results to the patient's family or specialist physician(s). However, on the 3 occasions I did so, I was advised by the physician's office staff that they did not wish to receive MedsCheck results because they were too busy to address the issues described in the report. Instead, it was suggested that if the patient felt it would be beneficial, they could bring their MedsCheck report to their physician's office for a scheduled appointment. It seems to me that this is a more realistic course of action than bombarding physicians' offices with unrequested MedsCheck documentation.

Anna K. Steven RPh

Pharmacist, Port Weller Pharmacy, St. Catharines, Ont.

Competing interests: None declared.

REFERENCE

1. Tracy CS, Upshur REG. MedsCheck: an opportunity missed. *CMAJ* 2008;178:440.

DOI:10.1503/cmaj.1080024

Correction

A News article in the Feb. 26 issue about the activities of astronaut Dr. Scott Parazynski contained an error.¹ Parazynski undertook 7 spacewalks, not 3 as stated. *CMAJ* apologizes for this error.

REFERENCE

1. Howell E. "Honorary Canadian" heals a broken space station. *CMAJ* 2008;178:542.

DOI:10.1503/cmaj.080337