

UK now recruiting MDs in Germany

The UK Department of Health is preparing to recruit more physicians abroad and to send more patients out of the country for treatment.

The department held its first overseas job fair in Germany this past spring, when some 17 National Health Service (NHS) trusts set up recruiting booths. Officials estimate that Germany has a surplus of more than 6000 medical consultants.

However, some German doctors who are already working for the NHS say they have encountered hostility from their British colleagues. Many British doctors working for the NHS also see private patients, and some critics have charged that physicians object-

ing to the arrival of foreign doctors are simply trying to protect their private practices.

The UK has also opened the way for hospitals to reduce waiting times for surgery by contracting teams of foreign doctors and nurses to perform operations in underused NHS facilities.

One company, German Medicine Net, has offered to operate on 500 000 NHS patients awaiting elective procedures that do not require overnight hospital stays for Can\$1.5 billion. This includes the cost of setting up mobile surgery centres.

The British Medical Association (BMA) says it supports the use of private

and foreign health care providers "in the short to medium term" to cut waiting lists, but it also wants to see more physicians trained in the UK.

The NHS has already sent a small number of patients to France and other European Union countries for treatment. A national opinion poll sponsored by the BMA found that 42% of Britons would be willing to travel abroad for treatment and another 27% would be prepared to travel anywhere within the UK.

The chair of the BMA council, Dr. Ian Bogle, warned that surgical treatment abroad makes the continuity of postoperative care difficult. — *Mary Helen Spooner, West Sussex, UK*

PULSE

MDs' computer, PDA use on the upswing

The 2002 CMA Physician Resource Questionnaire has determined that personal computer use among Canadian physicians is nearing saturation coverage, with the proportion using them rising from 74% to 89% in the

past 5 years. Although female physicians are still slightly less likely to use computers than their male counterparts (87% vs 90%), the difference is not statistically significant. More than 90% of physicians in younger age

groups personally use computers, compared with 85% of those aged 55–64 and 68% of those aged 65 and older. GP/FPs are slightly less likely (86%) to use them personally than medical (93%) and surgical (91%) specialists. Thirty-eight percent of those not currently using computers indicated that they plan to do so in the next 12 months, while 44% had no plans to start.

This year's PRQ also indicated that more than one-quarter (28%) of Canadian physicians currently use a personal digital assistant (PDA) in clinical practice, a 47% increase over 2001. Male physicians are somewhat more likely to use them in their practices than females (30% v. 24%). Those in the under-35 age group are by far the most likely (44%) to use them in practice, while those aged 65 and older are least likely (12%). GP/FPs are slightly less likely (25%) to use PDAs than medical (31%) and surgical (30%) specialists. — *Shelley Martin, Senior Analyst, Research, Policy and Planning Directorate, CMA*

