

**The Phenomenon of the “Nursing Medics” (Doctors becoming nurses):
The Philippine Experience**

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ABSTRACT

The Philippines is one of the leading exporters of health professionals. Reports say that the country provides a great number of doctors abroad, next to India. On the other hand, the Philippines ranks first in supplying nurses to different countries. In 2002 alone, the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) reported that out of the 12,769 health professionals who left the country to work abroad, 93 percent (11,911) are nurses. Since 1994, statistics show a rising trend in the migration of nurses to other countries.

The demand for nurses has been consistently high in developed countries. Annually, thousands of job opportunities attract our nurses – highly competitive salary rates, attractive compensation and benefits, good living as well as working conditions - all in all translates to a better life and security. Mechanisms to facilitate and accelerate recruitment and employment procedures have been also established by developed countries to sustain their public health systems.

Filipino nurses are highly marketable and globally competitive. They have distinct advantage and better chances of employment abroad, given certain parallelisms in the health sciences curricula with that of the Northern countries', complemented by rigorous training programs. Socio-cultural and economic factors, political instability, and poor working conditions in the country, coupled with the overall Philippine Government labor export policy, heighten the exodus of these nurses.

This phenomenon has never been a more alarming concern as it is today. Not only nurses are leaving the country, but also medical doctors shifting careers to become nurses. Recent reports show that an estimated 4,000 doctors have already become nurses and they are rapidly increasing in number.

Data and conditions supporting this phenomenon are evident: increased nursing applications and enrollment resulting in the proliferation of schools offering the degree vis-à-vis the decreased medical applications and enrollment causing some medical schools to close down; introduction of a special nursing program for medical doctors; increased number of medical doctors taking the nursing licensure examination; and an intensified “nursing medics” population leaving the country.

The Philippines will never be able to compete with the salary scales and better opportunities in the Northern countries. This career shift embraced by Filipino doctors is a clear depiction of a serious social problem – a picture of a rapidly deteriorating Philippine public health system. There is no reason for the Philippine government to tolerate this trend of health human resource outflows to other countries. It is high time that the present Administration implement actions to address this health threatening situations. Strategic solutions recommended for immediate implementation include: the creation of a National Commission on Health Human Resources Development, initiation of high-level bilateral negotiations with Northern countries importing Filipino nurses/doctors, north-south hospital to hospital partnership agreements, institution of a National Health Service Act, creation of the Philippine National Council for Medical and Nursing Concerns, and global representation in the World Trade Organization (WTO) to regulate and monitor the trading of medical and nursing services between North-South countries.

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