

TOWARD A PAN-CANADIAN APPROACH TO THE ETHICAL RECRUITMENT OF INTERNATIONAL HEALTH PERSONNEL

BACKGROUND

Global pressure for more ethical international recruitment of health personnel has been building for over 10 years. In August 2008, the World Health Organization issued a draft code of practice on the international recruitment of health personnel.

That same year, the federal, provincial and territorial Deputy Ministers of Health directed the federal, provincial, territorial Advisory Committee on Health Delivery and Human Resources (ACHDHR) to develop a pan-Canadian approach to the ethical recruitment of international health personnel.



METHOD

Work was undertaken in several stages:

- Completion of a discussion paper exploring the global context for a policy on ethical recruitment, key issues for consideration, and the challenges of developing a Canadian ethical recruitment policy;
- Development of a draft set of guiding principles informed by the WHO Draft Code of Practice, but tailored to the Canadian context, for jurisdictions to consider;
- Administration of web-based survey on draft Principles;
- Meeting of national stakeholders and representatives of jurisdictions to ensure that key players were able to express their views and to verify the web-based findings.

FINDINGS

In total, 75 surveys were completed by respondents across a range of sectors in the provinces and territories. Approximately 50 participants attended the national meeting.

Findings from the consultation process revealed that while there was strong support for a set of guiding pan-Canadian principles, participants were also aware of challenges related to implementation including:

- The distributed authority and structure of the Canadian health care system;
- Respect for an individual's right to migrate;
- Challenges associated with self-sufficiency and distribution within the health human resources;
- Capacity for increased data collection and monitoring.

Recognizing that the effectiveness of policies on the ethical recruitment of international health personnel requires the support from all those involved in the recruitment process, a revised set of guiding pan-Canadian principles, informed by the WHO Draft Code of Conduct but tailored to the Canadian context, was developed by the ACHDHR in consultation with jurisdictions and key stakeholders.

PRINCIPLES FOR A PAN-CANADIAN APPROACH TO THE ETHICAL RECRUITMENT OF INTERNATIONAL HEALTH PROVIDERS

All jurisdictions recognize the need to balance their responsibility to educate sufficient health care providers to meet population health needs with their responsibility to provide opportunities for skilled immigrants who want to make their home in Canada and their responsibility as global citizens to not intentionally weaken other countries' health care systems.

- Jurisdictions should strive to create a self-sufficient health workforce and work towards establishing effective health workforce planning that will reduce their need to recruit international health personnel.
- Efforts should be made to enhance and make more readily available existing sources of data and information on the recruitment and migration of international health personnel so that all jurisdictions may address international workforce issues.
- The recruitment of international health personnel should be transparent and fair. The employment of international health personnel should be in accordance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and applicable Labour Codes.
- In recruiting international health personnel, jurisdictions should make efforts to ensure that source countries vulnerable to critical shortages of health personnel derive benefits to assist in sustaining their domestic health workforce.
- While international health personnel have a right to leave their country and seek a better quality of life, and jurisdictions have the responsibility to ensure an adequate supply of health personnel to improve access to quality health care, recruitment efforts should not systematically target developing countries, countries with economies in transition, and countries that have been identified by the World Health Organization as experiencing critical shortages of health personnel.

CONCLUSIONS

The pan-Canadian principles developed through this process will encourage a more consistent approach to recruitment — both outside and within Canada — while still acknowledging each jurisdiction's authority to develop practices that reflect its goals and health human resource challenges.