

Beyond registration: The ongoing language support needs of foreign-trained healthcare professionals.



Setting the scene: English testing

- Reliance on foreign-trained healthcare professionals varies across English-speaking countries.
- For example, according to OECD 2015 statistics the percentage of foreign-trained doctors ranges from around a quarter in Canada and the USA, to a third in the UK and Australia and almost half in New Zealand.
- Regardless of the degree of reliance, it's vital to ensure the required English proficiency to protect patient safety and quality of care.

Proving English proficiency for healthcare

- Foreign-trained healthcare professionals seeking employment in English-speaking environments need to prove English proficiency to gain registration.
- Requirements set by healthcare regulators are different for each profession in each country and include English tests, among other forms of proof.
- English tests include: OET, IELTS, TOEFL, PTE and CELBAN (used for nurses in Canada).

Language tests currently used: by country

Canada

Nurses: CELBAN

Doctors: IELTS/TOEFL

Immigration: IELTS/CELPIP

USA

Healthcare: IELTS/TOEFL

Immigration: IELTS

UK & Ireland

Doctors & Nurses: OET/IELTS

Other healthcare: IELTS

Immigration: IELTS/Trinity

Australia

Healthcare: OET/IELTS/TOEFL/PTE

Immigration: OET/IELTS/TOEFL/PTE/CAE

New Zealand

Healthcare: OET/IELTS/TOEFL/PTE

Immigration: OET/IELTS/TOEFL/PTE/FCE

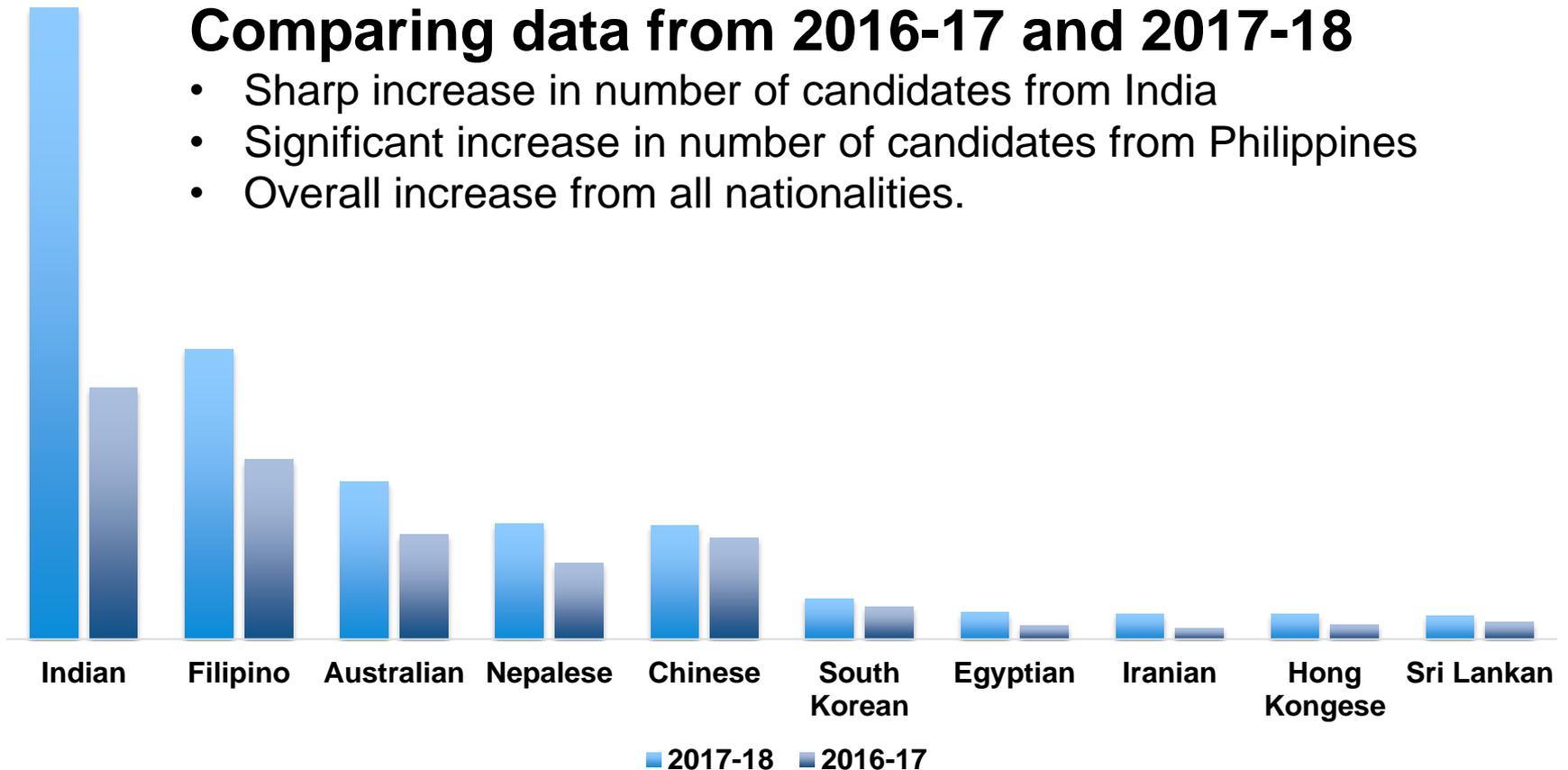
Overview of OET

- OET assesses the English language skills of healthcare professionals seeking to register and practise in an English speaking environment.
- OET replicates English language communication skills required for effective communication in a healthcare environment.
- It provides a valid and fair assessment of all four language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing.

OET candidates: top 10 nationalities

Comparing data from 2016-17 and 2017-18

- Sharp increase in number of candidates from India
- Significant increase in number of candidates from Philippines
- Overall increase from all nationalities.



Why candidates choose OET



Recognition

Accepted by healthcare boards and councils in the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Dubai, as well as leading healthcare educators. OET is also recognised by Australian and New Zealand immigration for visa purposes.



Relevance and familiarity

OET is recommended by past test takers because test materials reflect healthcare scenarios leading to confidence on test day.



Confidence

OET helps candidates develop the language skills to communicate effectively in the healthcare workplace.

How OET is different to other tests



Example 1: Writing

General/Academic English Test

Write an essay on
a general topic

OET

Write a healthcare
letter, usually a referral
letter, based on
case notes



Example 2: Speaking

General/Academic English Test

Structured interview
on a general topic

OET

Health professional
patient role-plays

How OET compares with IELTS

	Registration of foreign-trained doctors	
	IELTS - Academic	OET
Australia	7 in each sub-test	B in each sub-test
New Zealand	7 in each sub-test	B in each sub-test
UK	7 in each sub-test, with overall in 7.5	B in each sub-test
Ireland	7 in each sub-test	B in each sub-test
Canada	7 in each sub-test	n/a

The survey



Improving communication skills

OET assesses English language and communication skills to ensure patient safety and quality of care.

Our question: What are the ongoing language training needs of foreign-trained healthcare professionals?

Survey methodology and objectives

Methodology

An online survey with 14 questions was distributed to 55,000 OET alumni via email in February 2018. There were 2,083 (4%) responses in a 28-day period.

Objectives

The purpose of the study was to survey OET alumni on their English test experience and assess the need for advice on how to improve English language and communication skills after registration.

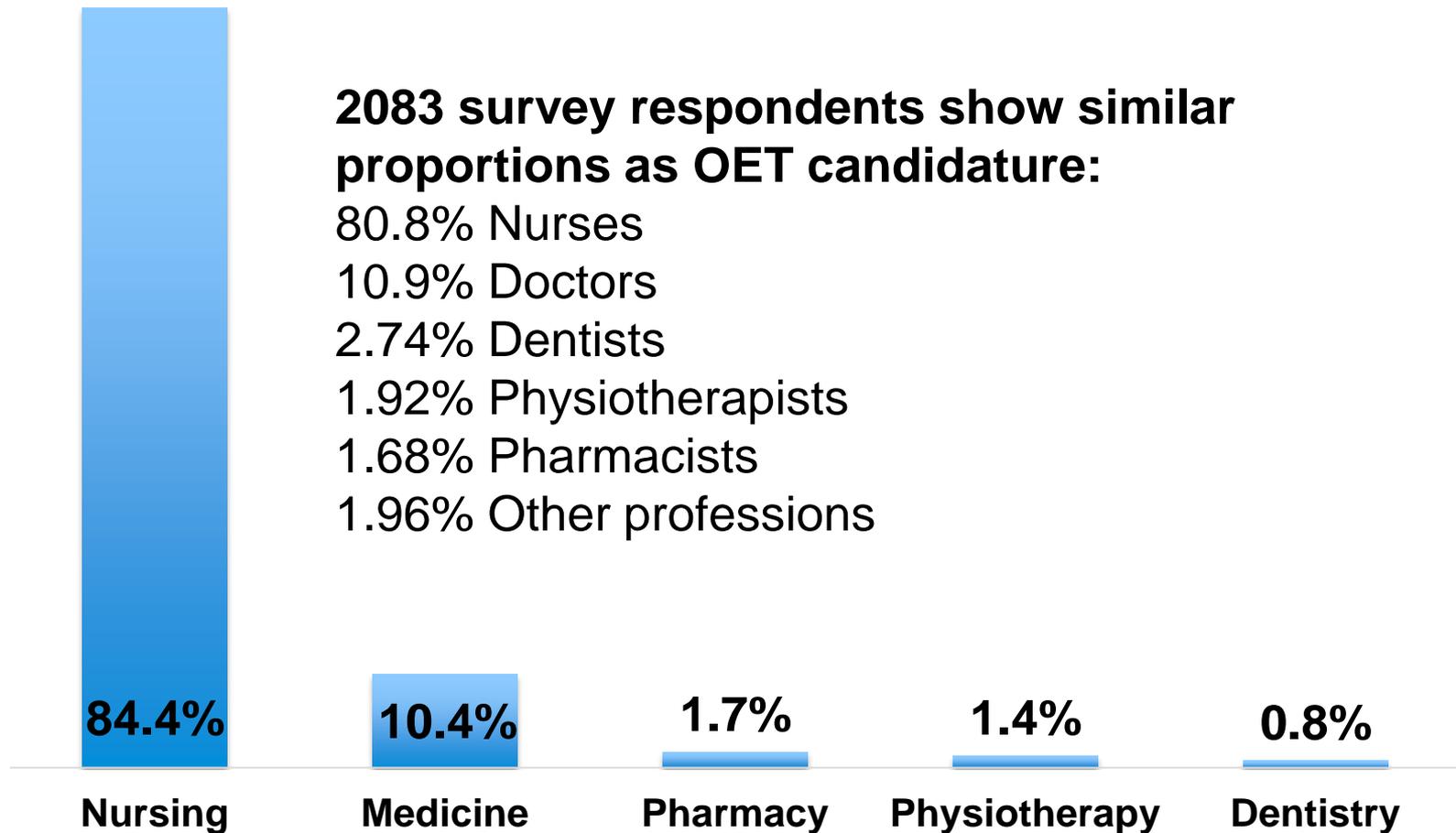
Survey questions

1. Is a healthcare-specific English test useful for preparing candidates for the workplace?
2. How likely are OET alumni to access ongoing advice on English language communication skills?

Survey findings



Top 5 professions by candidature and % of survey respondents in each profession



OET language skill assessment criteria

Reading

Show you can read and understand different types of text on health-related subjects.



Speaking

Show you can effectively communicate in a real-life context through the use of healthcare role plays.



Writing

Show you can write a letter in a clear and accurate way which is relevant to the reader.



Listening

Show you can follow and understand a range of health-related spoken materials, such as patient consultations and lectures.



Skills perceived as important by healthcare professionals

OET involves clinically relevant communication tasks, and interdisciplinary research has ensured performance is judged against clinically relevant criteria.

- ARC Linkage project (2013, Elder etc.) *The Towards Improved Healthcare Communication*, and ARC Linkage project (2017, Knock etc) *Towards Improved Quality of Written Patient Records* investigated domain experts' views on what they value in communications in health care contexts:
Linguistic skills and clinical communication skills
- These studies result in clinical communication criteria that will be assessed alongside the linguistically-oriented criteria in OET.
- The introduction of the clinical criteria will certainly influence how the candidates prepare or are prepared for the test, thus creating an immediate positive washback.

OET helped develop language skills needed in my workplace

Agree or strongly agree:

61% of doctors currently working in English-speaking countries

71% of nurses currently working in English-speaking countries

63% of other professions

Qualitative findings – countries where English is a secondary language

“It’s quite relevant I would say. It has helped me fine tune my letter writing, especially referral letters and also communication skills.”

Doctor from Malaysia currently working in Malaysia.

“I’m working as a nurse in Spain and I have a lot of patients from the UK. Thanks to OET I’m able to talk to them about diagnosis, treatment, tests etc. without any problems.”

Spanish nurse currently working in Spain.

Qualitative findings – challenges faced by new recruits in the workplace

“I rarely have difficulty to communicate with customers but occasionally get stuck when customers start talking with slang or in very casual ways.”

Pharmacist currently working in Australia.

“I’m trained in American English. Where I work, Kiwis speak a different English and sometimes their accent needs quite getting used to.”

Nurse from the Philippines currently working in Auckland.

How likely are you to access ongoing advice and support from OET?

81% of all respondents are likely or very likely to access ongoing advice and support from OET.

“All practicing healthcare professionals need mentorship and training in communication and a safe environment to develop new skills.”

Professor Peter Martin, Chair Clinical Communication at Deakin University.

Qualitative findings – nurses trained and qualified in an English-speaking country

What about the 19% who do not want to access ongoing advice?

Qualitative results show that foreign nurses who have trained in an English-speaking country are less likely to access ongoing advice.

“After studying nursing in Australia (in English) I was shocked that I could not register and practice unless an academic IELTS or OET test was taken.”

Nurse currently working in Perth, Australia unlikely to access ongoing advice.

Policy implication

Healthcare employers should consider providing communication training with modules tailored for internationally-trained staff

In the words of one of our candidates:

“Preparation for OET is useful...However, in the real settings we need more effort to achieve this (good communication). So continued support from OET will be beneficial.”

Doctor from Japan currently working in Australia.

Does limited communication impact health in vulnerable communities?

Limited language proficiency is an obstacle to effective communication affecting quality of care.

(Elder 2013). Source: Elder, C. et al. (2013) Towards improved healthcare communication: Development and validation of language proficiency standards for non-native English speaking health professionals. ARC Linkage Project.

In regional, rural and remote areas of Australia, international medical graduates comprise 43% of the GP workforce. Source: Medicare Australia

“Sometimes [language] is a challenge. Especially when older people use some specific expressions or slang and then younger people use a different slang.”

Dr Pour Ali - <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-03-21/migrant-doctor-finds-work-in-the-bush/7259312>

Thank you

