Mobility challenges for medical doctors in the European Union: A systematic review of intracommunity migration difficulties

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Mobility of medical doctors

Source: Licensing procedures and registration of medical doctors in the European Union, Eszter Kovacs et al.
Reliance on foreign MDs in selected EU and non-EU OECD countries, 2008 or latest year available*

Source: Health Professional Mobility and Health Systems: Evidence from 17 European countries
Main findings
Main findings - Mobility barriers

1. Issues with licensing/registration procedures (Member States)

Austria

– EU Member States must apply for a work permit from the AMS
– License of medicine is granted > 3 years in-service training
– MDs unable to train as specialists in countries where the license of medicine is a precondition

Medical Oncology - the example of Italy

– Not currently recognized as a professional qualification at EU Level => MDs from a few European countries (e.g. Italy) are hindered in their professional mobility.
– Additional training required to be able to practice in other countries.
Main findings - Mobility barriers

1. Issues with licensing/registration procedures (Member States)

Germany/Italy

- Need for much greater clarity about systems of governance
  = Who is responsible for what?

Hungary and Germany

- Complex bureaucratic pathways

Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Malta, Slovenia, Netherlands

- Much simpler approach

Romania, United Kingdom

- Intermediate positions
Main findings - Mobility barriers

2. Issues with licensing and/or registration procedures (EU Level)

- There are different interpretations of even the basic terminology
- The lack of complete validity of certain specialties in the EU
- Wide variation across EU member states in the way medical regulatory bodies manage professional issues involving quality and patient safety
- Unclear documentation and procedures for obtaining the professional card
Main findings - Mobility barriers

3. Issues related to communication, cultural and/or linguistic barriers

- Cultural differences and norms
- Lack of knowledge about working abroad => skewed expectations
- Language - competence (medical?)
- Communication skills
Main findings - Mobility barriers

4. Issues related to the working environment

• Perception of acceptable relationship between the state and the health professional (UK)

• Perception of misdemeanors by health professionals (New Member states)

• Hostile social and working environments (Portugal)
Licensing procedures and registration of medical doctors in the EU

Source: Licensing procedures and registration of medical doctors in the European Union, Eszter Kovacs et al.
Main findings - Mobility barriers

5. Common European framework

• Different health care systems
• Lack of continuing professional development systems
• Variability of disciplinary processes found in participating Member States
Most disciplinary process steps

- Suspension, interim suspension from the register, dismissal from the register of medical professionals and license revocations (depending on what confers the right to practice)
- Reprimand, warnings, fines, as well as additional education and training, working under supervision
- Financial compensation for patients when something goes wrong

**Source:** Deciding when physicians are unfit to practise: an analysis of responsibilities, policy and practice in 11 European Union member states, Verena Struckmann et al.
Main findings - Mobility barriers

6. Barriers related to financial issues

- Cross-border payment or reimbursement of costs by social security bodies

- Destination countries also experience economic difficulties

- High income taxes vs. Low salaries (in some countries)

- Private sector appeal (stick factor)
Main findings - Mobility barriers

7. Barriers related to medical training

• Limited access and differences in continuing medical education

• Need for harmonization of training requirements

• Lack of familiarity with advanced equipment
  – May lead to high error rates

• Differences in training between local and immigrant doctors
Main findings - Mobility barriers

8. Personal barriers

- Separation from family
- Settling down with family in a destination country

Lithuania

- Fear of being an “outlander"
- Age
- Fear of leaving already established career
Main findings - Mobility barriers

9. Others

• Lack of transparency in some countries
  – No access to records related to licensing and registration of doctors

• Downsizing of the public sector
Main findings - Variable potency

- EU Legal Framework
- Communication, cultural and/or linguistic
- Licensing and/or registration (Member State Level)
- Licensing and/or Registration (EU Level)
- Financial issues
- Training
- Work environment
- Personal matters
- Other
Conclusions

• The materials selected for review provide evidence of existing challenges for physicians that migrate within the European Union, despite recent efforts made by policy-makers to improve EU regulations.

• In terms of equity, an exacerbated policy of free mobility can have negative effects on:
  – **Member States** (through inefficient investment in medical training and further deepening of inter-state inequalities)
  – **Medical doctors** (in countries where a high influx of foreign doctors affect native practitioners, as discrimination faced by incoming health professionals as a response to this phenomenon)
  – **Patients** (in source countries, mobility brings equity concerns for the health professionals staying behind and for patients)
Conclusions

• Further efforts to improve the situation in the EU are necessary, but need to be informed and carefully assessed in terms of potential impact.

• A further avenue of study is to extend the search to non-EU medical doctors or non-EU countries.

• After full transposition of the Modernized Professional Directive in all Member States, a full EU-level impact evaluation must be done in order to assess the efficacy of the previous Directive and establish the next step in its development.
Limitations

• Analysis based only on available literature.

• Mainly focused on medical doctors.
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Thank you!