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A SURVEY ON EMIGRATION OF NIGERIAN MEDICAL DOCTORS

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Physicians' migration has existed for decades. Current trend in Nigeria however reveals an exponentially increasing migration of physicians from Nigeria to high income countries such as USA and UK amongst others.

AIM/OBJECTIVE

This study evaluates the intentions of Nigerian medical doctors to emigrate and the probable causative factors leading to increasing migration in order to inform country specific strategies to decrease it.

METHOD

A descriptive study was conducted among 317 medical doctors (Resident doctors, medical officers and house officers) practicing in 6 states in Nigeria (Imo, Akwalbom, Lagos, Anambra, Cross-river and Enugu). A pretested, interviewer administered structured questionnaire was used for data collection and analyzed on Excel spreadsheets.

RESULT

Age of doctors interviewed ranged from 25-50 years (92.5% were aged 25-40years), with more males (64.7%) than females (35.3%). Most are single (56.6%). Residents and house officers constituted 90% of the subjects, with 88% of them working in government owned hospitals. About 74.4% of the respondents already nurse the intention to travel out of the country. Reported factors influencing emigration include: poor job satisfaction, poor salary, poor quality of life and availability of better medical services abroad. Most preferred destination was USA and UK (83%).

They seek to travel to practice medicine (72.5%) and for further studies (23.7%) About 43.1% of those with intention to travel had initiated plans to leave while 21.1% had passed their selection exams. Majority (65.4%) would either want to stay abroad permanently or return after 10-20 years if conditions in the country improve. About 14% have no intention to travel, their reasons being mostly finance and family ties.

CONCLUSION: A large number of young medical doctors in this study have intentions to emigrate to high income countries due to poor job satisfaction, poor quality of life among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Country leaders need to rise to the challenge by developing country specific strategy that will ensure improved health system in the country. This is vital to curbing this ugly trend.

Keywords: Migration, doctors, healthcare

INTRODUCTION

Physicians' migration has existed for decades. Current trend in Nigeria however reveals an exponentially increasing migration of physicians from Nigeria to high income countries such as USA and UK amongst others. Nigeria being the most populous country in Africa, is experiencing a significant physician migration in spite of having an existing critical shortage, with approximately 0.28 physician per 1000 population[1].

The trend of the migration of Nigerian physicians need to be mitigated; and the success of this is dependent on the country's leaders ability to determine the causative factors of migration in order to develop specific strategies to decrease it while the international community assistance will be required in addressing their role the support of the immigration of talented physicians who could make extraordinary difference to health in Nigeria.

The migration of physicians from Nigeria is a problem because of its adverse contribution to the health system. This is because physicians play a critical role in maintaining and sustaining the health of the populace, which implies that the proportion of the citizens of a country with good health will determine the robustness of the human capital needed to drive economic growth. In addition a significant loss to the country as a result of medical schools being heavily subsidized by the government.[2,3]

AIMS / OBJECTIVES

These include:

i. Evaluation of the intention(s) of Nigerian medical doctors to emigrate
ii. Determine the probable causative factors leading to the increase in migration
iii. Create specific strategies for the country to decrease migration as informed by (i) and (ii).

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RESULT

Age of doctors interviewed ranged from 25-50 years (92.5% were aged 25-40years), with more males, 205 (64.7%) than females,112 (35.3%). Most are single (56.6%). Residents and house officers constituted 90% of the subjects, with 88% of them working in government owned hospitals. About 74.4% of the respondents already nurse the intention to travel out of the country. Reported factors influencing emigration include: poor job satisfaction, poor salary, poor quality of life and availability of better medical services abroad. Most preferred destination was USA and UK (83%). They seek to travel to practice medicine (72.5%) and for further studies (23.7%) About 43.1% of those with intention to travel had initiated plans to leave while 21.1% had passed their selection exams. Majority (65.4%) would either want to stay abroad permanently or return after 10-20 years if conditions in the country improve. About 14% have no intention to travel, their reasons being mostly finance and family ties.

DISCUSSION

The result obtained clearly shows that the greater proportion (92.5%) of those interviewed fell within the younger population, which implies that the survey captured physicians within a more productive age. The larger proportions of respondents comprised male gender and were mainly Residents doctors and House officers; a group with strength and vigour to champion the pursuit for a better health care system of the country.

A large number of the respondents had the intentions to travel which isin agreement with the increase surge in emigration of doctors in recent times. Most of these doctors relocate to USA, UK, Canada and Dubai as was seen in a study by Nigerian Polling Organization[1] and is in concordance with what we have in our study.

Reports from previous studies have shown varying reasons for the migration of doctors. The reasons include better remuneration, better work environment, job satisfaction, professional advancement and better quality of life[4,5,6,7].

Similarly, the reported factors influencing emigration in this study were poor job satisfaction, poor salary, poor quality of life, better career progression and availability of better medical services abroad. In addition, majority of the respondents stated disinterest in returning to the country after emigration; however, some were of the opinion that if the country improves significantly they will come home in 10 to 20years time.

The respondents who indicated interest in migrating were proactive about their decision as 43.1% of them had initiated plans to leave of which 21.1% of them had passed their selection exams. In a similar study, 88% of the study subjects interested in jobs overseas had registered for licensing exams; 30% for Professional and Linguistic Assessment Board Exam, 30% for United State Medical Licensing Exam, 15% for Medical Council Of Canada Evaluating Exam, 15% for Australia Medical Council Exam and 10% for Dubai Health Authority Certification.[4]

Regardless of the rise in exodus of Nigerian doctors, about 14% of the respondents have no intention to travel, their reasons being mostly finances and family ties.

CONCLUSION

A large number of young medical doctors in this study have intentions to emigrate to high income countries due to poor job satisfaction, poor quality of life among others. This will in turn have adverse effect(s) on the nation's healthcare system as this large number falls within the category of people with high productivity rate and strength to promote better services required for improved health care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Country leaders need to rise to the challenge by developing country specific strategy that will enhance a safe and suitable work environment for physicians, introduce a better salary scheme and ensure improved health system in the country.

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