

THE NATIONAL DILEMMA: BRAIN DRAIN OF DOCTORS

Brain drain is the phenomenon of emigration of highly skilled and qualified professionals from one country to another mostly well-developed country. The outcome is the scarcity of qualified professionals in the native country which then undermines the progress of that particular country in long run. During this era of economic growth, the majority of developing countries like Greece, Iran, Nigeria, India, and Taiwan are the worst victims of brain drains. Pakistan is also facing this grave issue as the migration rate of highly skilled professionals augmented more than 60% from 1992 to 2000 as per UNESCO Report. Healthcare is no exception to this global phenomenon of brain drain. Statistics document that 2.7 million Pakistanis have left Pakistan in the last five years to find better work opportunities. According to a survey of Gallup-Pakistan, more than two-thirds of Pakistan's adult population including doctors have the desire to visit abroad in search of a better future. The worst scenario of this survey is that more than half have no desire to return at all. The lacunae created by this avoidable brain drain is obviously a drastic decline in public service, poor health of the nation and, poor overall progress in the society besides a bad reputation to the current Government. This perspective is focused on the insights of brain drain of doctors from Pakistan and strategies of reverting brain drain into brain gain.

For a professional group of people like the doctor community, a decision to move abroad is not only difficult and painful but also emotional. In the theory of Stages of Moral Development by Laurence Kohlberg, Consequentialism constitutes the stages of obedience and self-interest. Many factors are in the interplay if we look at this phenomenon, which includes the career, family, culture, finances, and state. If we over-simplify it in terms of person and state, the following is rational discourse.

Every doctor who graduates or specializes is invariably enthusiastic with the spirit of nationalism and service to humanity. However, what makes him take this drastic decision is not something which is a knee jerk and self-centered as is commonly propagated by vested interests. This "obedient" doctor is actually made to leave Pakistan by many acts of omission and commission by the state and healthcare system. Notable among them is a poor service structure, poor career progression, political interference at workplace and postings, lack of security, lack of research funding, and obviously low remunerations for the gigantic burden and stress when compared with the international counterparts. This when compared with the West and USA with good salaries, better quality of life, advance technologies, no political influence, equal

job opportunities and career progression obviously invokes self-interest which is natural and understandable. The situation is as there one is running to burn the calories acquired through excessive eating while over here one would have to run after the food to get the calories for a meager living. This condition is being exploited by rich countries like Ireland, the UK, the USA, and the Middle East who lure this intellectual segment of our society into their countries for serving their nations, which can be summarized as PUSH and PULL Phenomenon. One school of thought is favoring the doctor's brain drain as a source of remittances for the country but statistics are negating this concept from a broader perspective.

A way forward approach for long-term benefit should be applied in the best interest of this country. The Government is better advised to take cognizance of this great national tragedy in making. She cannot pretend to be indifferent if it really is caring for the masses because furthering one's career is a basic human right enshrined in the constitution. When there is a justification for it, nobody can put the blame on this affected segment of society. It is the right time to take all stakeholders in Health-related matters on board and into confidence. Heeding to the famous idiom "A stitch in times saves nine" it takes a vision and initiative on the part of the government to take the necessary remedial steps before it is too late. A successful Chinese approach to cope with Taiwan's brain drain and revert it into brain gain can be implemented as a role model by the current government. Moreover, a doctor's community living abroad is also requested to consider their homeland as a priority for the uplift of healthcare provisions. Both stakeholders (Government and doctor's community) should indulge in constructive dialogue for a better solution and uplift of healthcare infrastructure and services in Pakistan. On the principles of Deontology, we sincerely hope that duty begets duty. Let us doctors be allowed to put our effort into the building of a healthier nation and let the Government perform its role to make these health providers be mentally and physically healthy by discharging its duty to ensure a respectable place in the society for them.

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