“HEALTH WORKFORCE MIGRATION”
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Changes in contemporary society worldwide, coupled with changes in Bulgaria’s socio-economic environment have led to the appearance of new factors and preconditions influencing the nation’s migratory patterns.

The key economic factors affecting international labour migration are discrepancies in economic development among countries, differences in countries’ levels of technological advancement and expertise, significant differences in salary levels, working conditions and labour market security as well as in professional fulfilment and economic well-being.
A system of migration-determining factors provide the basis of each individual’s unique reaction and decision-taking regarding his/her own future – this includes choosing the country where he/she wishes to live and work temporarily or permanently.

Bulgaria has a National Strategy for Migration, Asylum and Integration 2012-2014. It aims to introduce effective national policies in managing migration processes. We live in a period of redistribution of the global workforce, a one-way process which needs to be managed wisely, balancing the interests of source and host countries as well as those of the migrants themselves.
Conversely, the ineffective management of migration processes can lead to a rise in the shadow economy, tension within the host society, degradation and exploitation of illegal immigrants.

The Bulgarian labour market already experiences workforce shortage in certain sectors, and the Bulgarian economy could benefit from attracting a well-managed stream of qualified foreign workers.
In Bulgaria, there are 32,000 registered doctors and 47,000 registered healthcare specialists – nurses, midwives, rehabilitators and others.

A Healthgrouper study in Bulgaria (www.healthgrouper.com) has revealed the current problems, which doctors here face every day. The overall conclusion one can draw from the data analysis is that the majority of doctors are unhappy in their work.

The study has confirmed negative factors such as low salaries, unnecessary paperwork, lack of a clear path to development and reform in the healthcare sector, media and societal perceptions of doctors, together with the existence of corruption in the healthcare system.
83% of public hospital doctors are unhappy with their monthly remuneration.

Over 60% of study respondents expressed job dissatisfaction, 47% are thinking of changing their workplace, whereas most of them – 78% – see emigrating as the alternative.

The highest degree of job dissatisfaction was observed among hospital doctors (62%) and university clinic doctors (53.8%), who are ready to change their workplace.

It is interesting to note that many doctors stated that they would remain in Bulgaria if working conditions improved and clear work rules were set up, which are currently missing.
The Healthgrouper study was based on an electronic questionnaire, which included questions on pay satisfaction, workplace security, social status, etc.

255 doctors from 55 Bulgarian towns and cities, representative of 54 different specialities took part in the study. Below you can see the gender breakdown between men (57%) and women (43%).
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Age groups:
- 56.3% aged 35-50 years
- 36.7% aged 51+ years
- 7% aged under 35 years.

Length of employment:
- 58% are doctors with over 20 years of practice.
- 44% work in the public healthcare system.
- 46.5% work in private healthcare, contracted with the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF).
- 9.5% are in private healthcare not linked to NHIF.
Main conclusions:
• 83% of public hospital doctors are unhappy with their pay.
• 49% of hospital and university clinic doctors are very dissatisfied.
• 48% of private sector doctors are happy with their job security.
• Over 47% of respondents are thinking of changing their workplace.
• Of those, 78.4% are considering going overseas, 16.3% are thinking of moving from the public to the private sector, and 5% are even considering changing their profession.
Here is a typical profile of a Bulgarian doctor who wants to move overseas:

Male or female, aged 36-45, qualified specialist with 10 to 15 years’ professional experience, works at a public hospital, very unhappy with the low pay and the lack of clearly defined workplace rules, is not respected by society.
Other conclusions

- Some respondents point to political influences over the appointment of management personnel. This also influences their job satisfaction. What leads to dissatisfaction? – Low pay, lack of freedom, dependence on managers who are often chosen politically rather than for their competence.

- The data analysis shows that of the doctors who leave the country 13% are aged 30 and under, and most – 48% – are aged 31-45. Of those, 11.3% are internal medicine specialists, followed by anaesthesiologists and other specialists. The countries they most often emigrate to are Germany, France and the United Kingdom.
Other conclusions

- There is a high risk of increased healthcare worker shortage in Bulgaria. 50% of practising doctors are aged over 50, whereas 20% have reached retirement age.

- Migration processes occur for the same reasons among healthcare specialists: low pay, excessive workload caused by insufficient staff numbers. Among nurses, there is also the degrading treatment they encounter from both patients and senior medical staff.

- A total of 1,293 nurses left Bulgaria in 2011; the qualifications of 1/3 of them were automatically recognised, whereas 2/3 of them work as caregivers.

- The minimum staff requirement for every healthcare system is of 2 nurses to 1 doctor. There are places in Bulgaria where staff is comprised of only 1 nurse for each doctor.
Other conclusions

• Another alarming phenomenon is the appearance of large regional discrepancies. There are areas without any doctors or medical care available.

• Lack of pay satisfaction, fatigue with ongoing reforms, bureaucratic obstacles, conditions of retirement, career path, society’s attitude towards the medical profession – all these factors contribute to migration and the worsening quality of our healthcare services.

• Sadly, there is insufficient analysis, no decisions regarding the lack of medical personnel; there are only ascertained facts.
Other conclusions

- All parties concerned must be included in the debate on Bulgaria’s healthcare strategy for the next 10 years. This has not been the case up to date.

- A clear professional and political vision must be formulated.

- Administrative workload which interferes with the process of medical treatment must be reduced.

- Tolerance must be encouraged within society among media, patients and doctors.

- What needs to be improved: wage conditions, imbalances in the remuneration for different specialities, the lack of medical consumables and modern equipment, and many other conditions.

- The continued emigration of medical specialists will aggravate the problems caused by the lack of specialised medical professionals and the quality of healthcare services.
Thank you for your attention.

The policies of retention of medical specialists both in their profession and in Bulgaria necessitate that the fundamental reasons for leaving be addressed and tackled with political will!

Healthcare migration processes - Bulgaria 2013

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