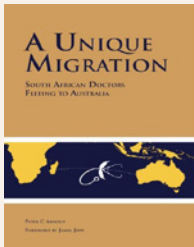


Reviewing A unique migration: South African doctors fleeing to Australia

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Reviewing A unique migration: South African doctors fleeing to Australia

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This book, based on a survey done amongst South African doctors in Australia, provides a clear and detailed account of all the elements that influenced their migration to that country.

The book is easy to read and understand. The author has written it from a non-academic perspective. This widens its readership.

The flow of the ten chapters in the book is excellent. The beginning of each chapter presents its aim and each chapter concludes with a concise summary. The author has supported the content of the book with ample graphs, figures and tables so that even a layman can read and understand it.

The author has succeeded in producing a well-timed book that examines the movement of skilled professional human capital from a third world (or developing) country to a first world (or developed) country.

The book looks at South African medical doctors who have left the country. The author has attempted to answer a number of questions. They include:

- Who are the doctors who have left South Africa?
- Why did they leave South Africa?
- What work are they doing in Australia?
- How qualified were they when they left?

One can say that this book, based on a thorough scientific survey amongst 469 respondents, gives an overview of this atypical migration. It also shows that one needs to analyse the social backgrounds and life circumstances of those who migrated in order to understand their motives for doing so.

This publication has much-needed information that the Australian and South African governments and health care divisions of these countries can use to retain medical practitioners intending to migrate to other parts of the world. The fact that South Africa has a national health care plan may create new factors that will cause more doctors and other health care workers to emigrate.

This is not a textbook for students. However, it may serve as supplementary reading for postgraduate students and researchers in the fields of human resource management (HRM), labour economics, sociology and industrial sociology. It is also highly recommended for health care workers and doctors who intend to emigrate to other countries.

Chapter one concentrates on the political and social effects of the apartheid era. It covers terminology relevant to the period, the particular levels of a multilayered society into which the apartheid government slotted people, the effects of legally enforced discrimination, the different cultures and their influence as well as the effects of religion and apartheid. Chapter one also covers Jewish sensitivities and their flight as educated South Africans. There are many references to the migration of Jews throughout the book. The chapter also discusses very critically and directly the effects of racial classification on study at medical schools in South Africa.

Chapter two reveals that the ethnic variation in South Africa has determined the nature of the emigration of doctors to a significant extent. The author conducted an ethnic analysis and used basic statistical techniques to address a number of issues and to pinpoint race, university of study, religion, location of practice, medical experience and gender. The responses to the author's survey and his overall analysis of the composition of South African doctors in Australia show that it is not feasible to draw any general conclusions about them.

In chapter three, the author examines the reasons why the respondents left South Africa closely. The survey groups the respondents' reasons into four eras. It gives a clear picture of the dissatisfaction with living in South Africa. The author also discusses in depth the ethnic differences in emigration, during and after the apartheid era. The findings of the survey confirm the importance of the push as opposed to the pull factors in the move to Australia.

Chapter four covers the question of why doctors from South Africa chose to migrate to Australia. It shows that the choice of destination relates to each respondent's background. For example, Afrikaans-speaking respondents were not keen on migrating to the United States of America (USA) and preferred Canada and New Zealand, whilst Jewish respondents preferred the USA and Israel. The main reasons for choosing Australia are the attractive lifestyle, having family in Australia and job opportunities. For those doctors accustomed to cosmopolitan city life, the four largest cities in Australia proved to be the main attraction.

The next chapter shows that the major obstacles to emigration have been the approaches the medical registering bodies in the different states in Australia have taken. It discusses the tightening of restrictions for registering to practice in Australia and their relaxation again in 2006. It also refers to varying examination difficulties. The chapter gives special attention to the recognition of specialists.

In chapter six, the author deals with the experiences of migrant doctors and addresses the question of what they have done in Australia as well as how the Australians received them. It compares the percentages of respondents in different areas of specialisation with Australian doctors. It also addresses the location of the respondents, when they migrated and their ethnicity. The author concludes that, for the vast majority of respondents, the move has been overwhelmingly positive.

The objective of chapter seven is to consider the factors that are relevant to the migrant doctors' families. It became clear from the survey that, apart from language, adapting to a new culture is a concern for older migrants. Here again ethnicity plays a major role. The chapter also gives information about the family members who accompanied the doctors, those they left behind and relatives who joined them in Australia. Chapter eight places the movement of health professionals in an international context. It briefly discusses the views of international organisations, like the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Bank. The problems of colonial medical

education, medical emigration from the British colonies and the effect of foreign medical graduates on Australia gives a clear picture of international views. South Africa has the fourth highest number of medical graduates who emigrate to Australia.

In the first six pages of chapter nine, the author gives a concise summary of his findings in the previous eight chapters of the book. It highlights the most important points and findings of the study. The very important issue that this chapter raises is that the influx of South African doctors, and what it means for Australian patients, are matters that will need to be revisited some decades from now. The remaining five pages discuss the applicability of migration theory to South African emigrant doctors. It refers to the theories of Boyd, Massey, Faist and Castles.

The last chapter contains the author's views on the 'brain drain' from developing (third world) countries to developed (first world) countries. He gives the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments and counter-arguments about the phenomenon.

The writer has successfully surveyed and analysed the reasons for medical doctors emigrating from South Africa to Australia. However, the most important limitation of this book is that it offers no solution to stopping it from occurring.

From the human resources perspective, the retention of highly skilled labour at the micro level (in a single business or industry) and at the macro level (in the country as a whole) is essential.

Researching the reasons why doctors leave South Africa is commendable. However, we need a separate study to determine what methods we can use to prevent doctors from emigrating. Although this was not the objective of Arnold's book, an extension of his study to include methods of preventing the emigration of skilled labour would have helped human resource practitioners to address the problem.