

*October 30, 2005*

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## **Paging Dr India**

A physician friend from India who is working on the year end Golden Jubilee celebrations of Bangalore Medical College e-mailed me recently seeking help in contacting alumni in the United States. He reckons that of the 7000 medical graduates the school has produced in half a century, at least 1000 are in the U.S, and perhaps as many as 2000 are outside India. I was wondering if this is true of other Indian medical schools when I came across an article in the New England Journal of Medicine that provides a startling insight into the flight of doctors from low-income countries, including India. The biggest beneficiaries of this migration are four rich white countries -- the United States, Great Britain, Canada and Australia.

India has graduated the highest number of doctors in the world (around 504,000) next only to the United States (840,000). India is the biggest loser (or "donor," if you wish) of doctors to the four rich countries surveyed (R-4, for purposes of this article). Some 12 per cent of the half million Indian medical graduates have migrated to the R-4. As a result, India is the top contributor of doctors to the United States (40,839 or almost 5 per cent of the U.S physicians work force) and to the United Kingdom (15,093 or almost 11 per cent of its doctors work force). Indian doctors are the second most numerous in Australia after the locals (2143 or 4 per cent) and they are third in Canada (1149 or 2.1 per cent). These four countries alone account for 60,000 Indian physicians.

Top six contributors to the U.S physicians pool besides India at the top spot include Philippines (17873 doctors), Pakistan (9667), Canada (8990), China (6687), the former USSR (5060), Egypt (4593) and Mexico (4578). While India has lost some 12 per cent of its medical graduates, Pakistan fares no better (lost 12800 of its 97000 MGs to the R-4). Sri Lanka has lost a staggering 27 per cent (3000 out of 8000). Bangladesh, probably because it is a new country, has lost only 5 per cent (1700 out of 32000). But the biggest losers in percentage terms are countries in sub-Saharan Africa and

the Caribbean, which produce a small pool of medical graduates, almost half of whom flee to the U.S.

You can see the effect of this migration in the U.S where one out of every four doctors is a foreign medical graduate. Remember, we are not even counting the children of immigrant physicians who take after the parent and go to medical school. Thanks to this inflow of foreign doctors, the U.S has around 35 physicians per 10,000 population. The ratio is even better for United Kingdom, Canada and Australia. India has around 5.2 doctors per 10,000 population, or a doctor for every 2000 people (compared to one for every 280 in the U.S). The deleterious effect of this shortage shows in a range of dismal health metrics in India – from its high birth rates to high infant mortality.

For India to produce more doctors than any other nation save the U.S means the country's leadership laid a pretty solid foundation in medical education. But they did little to retain the talent they nurtured. Today, some 250 Indian medical colleges graduate about 30,000 doctors annually. So India will likely have a million plus physicians before 2020. They will saturate the R-4 and discover new pastures. Before long, Indian medical colleges, like the IITs, will be having their alumni meeting in Boston instead of Bangalore, Canberra instead of Chennai, and Manchester instead of Mumbai.

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