



NATIONAL RURAL
HEALTH
ALLIANCE INC.

Policy Portion 2004/2

Australia & the global supply of health professionals

The world is short of health professionals. The World Health Organisation has noted that the most critical issue facing health care systems is the shortage of the people who make them work.¹ The migration of health professionals within and between countries contributes to the 'brain drain' being acutely experienced by both developed and developing countries. There is a continued movement of the workforce to urban areas, and from poorer to richer countries. Australia cannot address its own health workforce needs in isolation from these global trends. Improved workforce planning, new models of collaborative health care delivery, increased access to professional education and training, and health sector reform focussing upon the core primary health care principles of access, affordability and sustainability, are all needed more than ever. Ethical recruitment practices must reflect these principles.

As a wealthy country, Australia has an ethical responsibility to make a net contribution to the global supply of health professionals. Currently this is not the case. Governments and all other organisations involved must make a commitment to correcting this situation.

Most health professional organisations in Australia (and certainly all of those in the Alliance) support the principles enunciated in *The Melbourne Manifesto - A Code of Practice for the International Recruitment of Health Care Professionals (HCPs)*. This was adopted in May 2002 and requires a Memorandum of Understanding to be signed before one country recruits health care professionals from another.

The Manifesto is to help ensure that wealthier countries do not recruit HCPs from poorer countries. The alternative option is for such countries to educate sufficient numbers for their own needs and to make a net contribution to world supply. This will help countries that have seriously under-resourced health systems. Despite the serious shortage of HCPs in many parts of rural and remote Australia, the Alliance and its Member Bodies are committed to the principles of the Melbourne Manifesto.

One of the premises of *Healthy Horizons Outlook 2003-2007* is "worst first" – health resources should be directed first to those in greatest need. This principle should apply even more strongly in the international situation where health services and health status are so unequal.

Recommendation:

To help meet the local and international demand for health care, the Australian Government and Opposition must commit to increasing the number of training places for health care professionals in Australia.

¹ World Health Organisation (2003) "The World Health Report 2003 – Shaping the Future" WHO: Geneva. Accessed 17th February, 2004 from <<http://www.who.int/whr/en/>>