

# French Doctors Working in Great Britain: A Study of their Characteristics and Motivations for Migration

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## ABSTRACT

### Objective

This study aims to investigate and discuss the reasons why French doctors choose to work in Great Britain.

### Methods

A self-completed questionnaire was sent to French doctors having studied in France and registered with the British Medical Council in 2005.

### Results

The response rate was at least 37%. Emigration is decided for both professional and personal reasons (59%) or, essentially for women, to join a spouse (29%) or for purely professional reasons (12%): essentially men disappointed with conditions in the French hospital system and finding that the *National Health Service* provides a better environment.

### Conclusion

Our results, even if not extendable to all the French doctors currently working in Britain, highlight the principal reasons for their move to Britain. Though few doctors emigrate, the trend testifies to, first, their dissatisfaction of the French health-care system and, second, their interest in the NHS.

**Keywords:** emigration and immigration, attitude of health personnel, physicians, Great Britain, France.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2006 there were 207,000 doctors working in France, and the reasons for setting up in private practice were relatively homogeneous: stay in the same region and optimize lifestyle (group practice, well developed local infrastructure, limited working hours and duty periods). Yet 200 French doctors practice in the United Kingdom despite the language barrier.

Who are they and what motivated them to move across the Channel? Does the British health system correspond better to their professional and personal expectations? As there are few publications on this subject<sup>1-4</sup> and as they did not provide a complete answer to these questions, we set out to answer them by interviewing expatriate French doctors working in Britain. We thus contacted French doctors registered with the British Medical Council in 2005 to determine their principal characteristics as well as their reasons for moving to Britain.

### Principal data on expatriate French doctors working in Britain

Doctors are highly qualified professionals, and their migration follows the same pattern as that of other qualified professionals (described as the "the brain drain" in the literature.<sup>5-10</sup> The main reasons<sup>11-14</sup> for emigration are well known: improvement in quality of life (better work environment and greater security, increased revenues advanced training opportunities, better education for children...) and career prospects.

It is likely that this migration is being encouraged. Indeed, to increase the number of doctors, a state can put more resources into training its own or simply benefit from the immigration of doctors from other countries. Training doctors requires substantial investment in educational facilities, and the effect will only be felt in the medium term, given that it takes a minimum of ten years to train a doctor. By encouraging foreign doctors to come to work, health services can fill posts left vacant by indigenous doctors very quickly, and it is often far cheaper to «import» a doctor than to spend money training one.<sup>15</sup> Foreign doctors may be recruited by direct contact via specialized recruitment agencies (head-hunting), or within the framework of an agreement between two countries (certain countries, for example, train too many doctors), or by the use of simplified procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications, which makes it possible to control both the professional quality of the immigrant health workers and their numbers.<sup>16</sup>

The European Union (EU) welcomes doctors from non-member countries, but also facilitates movement of professionals between member states by mutual recognition of national diplomas, especially those related to medical stud-

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