

Preface

In recent years there have been renewed concerns worldwide about the tremendous drain of resources that can occur when skilled health professionals migrate, particularly from developing to developed countries. Although such movement often has many advantages for the individuals concerned and their families, from the point of view of donor countries, it can have far-reaching consequences both for their economies and the development of their health services.

In the Commonwealth, migration of health professionals is a major problem for some member countries, particularly small states. As a result, Health Ministers, at their meeting in Barbados in November 1998, called for a study to identify practical strategies that would assist them in addressing the issue.

In response, in 1999 the Commonwealth Secretariat commissioned consultants to carry out literature reviews and to collect data from Ministries of Health in each of four Commonwealth regions (Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific), as a basis for recommending policies and strategic approaches to Commonwealth governments. This publication is based on a synthesis of the reports of these consultants.

The main message of this publication is that addressing the problem of migration of skilled health professionals should be part of individual countries' overall approach to human resource management, not an isolated activity. The publication also provides some valuable insights into human resource management in countries today, and identifies gaps in knowledge at the international, regional and country levels. At the same time the report identifies key issues facing Commonwealth governments and recommends strategies which they may find useful in addressing the issues.

The Secretariat is grateful for the contributions of many organisations and individuals. In particular we thank the Ministries of Health whose co-operation in providing data, other information and views was invaluable, and the Commonwealth Steering Committee for Nursing and Midwifery who have allowed us to include as an Annex their recently published guidance on the workforce issues related to the global crisis in the recruitment and retention of nurses and midwives.

We hope that the perspectives in this publication will contribute more widely to current thinking on human resource management, and to migration in particular, and that they will be an incentive to further international action where necessary.

*Professor Stephen A. Matlin,
Director, Human Resource Development Division,
The Commonwealth Secretariat*