

Letter to the editor

Shortly, Many Patients May Not Find Doctors to Treat in Iraq!

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Abstract

The current general situation of Iraqi doctors' satisfaction, as an associated factor with brain drain problem, has been started to be studied academically. Serious findings have been registered due to serious challenges that face doctors. These seem to have resulted in frustration and have made half of the doctors to think to immigrate outside Iraq; more seriously one third may take this step shortly. This may lead to real shortage in the health service providers. Such a situation in addition to the existing defect in the health system infrastructure and lack of training opportunities may end with new crisis in this country and add more burden on the suffering health institutions unless effective and efficient measures are taken soon.

Keywords: Brain drain, medical doctors, Satisfaction, Iraq

Background

Recently, serious concerns predict the emigration of third of Iraqi doctors during the next short period have been raised [1]. The main reasons claimed included the difficult and complex conditions that Iraq is going through, especially the dilapidated health system. These seem to generate considerable pressure on medical doctors because they are in the field of confrontation between the increasing needs of patients and the shortage in the capabilities of the country's health sector which imposed by the government's negligence of this important sector. In addition, the absence of security and stability, weak law enforcement, and the increase in violence in the country in general and against medical staff in particular; These are added more pressures that doctors are subjected to, such as economic, professional, social and psychological pressures that have led to the emigration of a large number of doctors or their exposure to physical liquidation [2].

The recent study tried to determine the challenges, risks, and concerns that Iraqi doctors suffer and ways to address them. Questioning a sample of doctors from various specialties from all the Iraqi governorates during the period from May 30 to June 17, 2020. This study revealed that the problems which may play a role in this emigration is most of the doctors do not feel safe for many reasons including the tribal threats, criminal gangs, fear of infection with serious diseases or administrative abuse that they themselves or their peers have been subjected to, especially a vast majority of them have had no trust in the governmental system, including the judiciary that result in lack of protection. Other factors that seem to facilitate taking the decision of fleeing the country included shortage in social and economic stabilizers, lack of governmental sponsored training opportunities outside the country, lack of modern and updated devices and equipment which are a necessity for their work in treating patients. Also lack of comfortable work environment and hostility of local media. The non-

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satisfaction or frustration has led more than 40% of the doctors will not choose medicine as a career if they go back in time and half of them will not choose the same current specialty.

Although, it has been documented over the last 14 years that the exporter countries work to reduce the emigration of their citizen medical doctors^[3], it seems this is not the case in Iraq. The negative outcomes and impacts of this drain can be summarized^[4]:

1. There will be a great loss for the people left behind in the exporter countries, raising the level of international inequalities.
2. The medical doctors emigrate before repaying the financial, social, ethical, and moral debt to their country of origin.
3. There will be reduction in medical manpower size and quality, causing reduction in the medical system's ability to manage health crises.
4. The development gap between the destination developed countries and the exporter developing ones will increase.

Conclusion

The conclusion which can be reached is that Iraqi doctors face a major physical, economic, psychological, emotional and social challenges that affect their professional performance, their lives, and the continuation of the situation in this way may lead to the emigration of a third of Iraqi doctors, especially after the Covid 19 pandemic, as many countries welcome foreign medical doctors due to the need of these countries for trained medical staff. This means that there is a possibility that Iraq may face shortage of doctors.

Recommendations

To avoid the concluded fate, it is recommended that the Government of Iraq and the Iraqi Doctors Association reduce the pressure on Iraqi doctors with the aim to

fulfill their potential, improving their professional performance in effective and efficient approach through expediting a legal acceptable effective health insurance in order to contribute to the development of health services and reduce the burden on doctors as a result of the current poor health services; securing and protecting doctors from the work relevant dangers such as infection, violence, medical errors; In addition, increasing government spending on developing and modernizing the governmental medical sector to bridge the gap with neighboring countries. Furthermore, improving working conditions in health institutions; establish a clear and effective system to reward outstanding doctors; improving the relationship between the judiciary and the doctors to improve their confidence in the judicial system more than in other social activities; conducting training and professional development courses for doctors need be held continuously and preferably outside their institutions as a measure to change the stressful work environment; encouraging the private sector to upgrade its services to be able to help reduce momentum from the governmental sector; and approving a major project aims at changing the media orientation to spread sober health culture and support the work of doctors.

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