

“Badly-paid Polish doctors look for work in EU

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Marcin Krzysliwski, a 41-year-old Polish radiologist, is busy learning Danish in a bid to escape from his low-paid job in Poland to the wealthy Nordic country.

"It's not easy to learn a foreign language at 41, but the prospect of a better life can produce miracles," he says.

Since Poland's entry into the European Union on May 1, between 200 and 400 doctors have left their hospitals disappointed at their working conditions, and others are set to follow them, according to recruitment agencies.

"In my lifetime, nothing will change in Poland in the health sector, where doctors are underpaid and hospitals badly-equipped," explained Krzysliwski, holding a Polish-Danish dictionary in his hand to look at during his breaks.

He is taking a six-month intensive Danish course with 40 other Polish doctors, at a posh Warsaw suburb, organised by an agency specialising in recruiting doctors for work in the European Union.

In Hjørring, a town of some 50,000 inhabitants in the north of Denmark where he will work and has already visited, "the hospital is very well-equipped, there is more modern equipment," said the doctor, who heads a radiology department in a 500-bed hospital in Poland's southern city of Krakow.

Radiologists, anaesthetists and pathologists are the most in demand in Denmark and Britain.

Offers of employment are advertised in the press and Internet sites by recruitment agencies which have found a new market in Poland with the enlargement of the European Union.

"Since May 1, doctors no longer have to get their medical diplomas recognised. They can, at least in theory, exercise their profession throughout the EU," the head of one agency, Adam Ringer, said.

He is preparing his second group for Denmark, as well as 60 doctors and dentists for Britain, the only country along with Ireland to have opened its labour market unconditionally to the 10 new EU members which joined on May 1.

Denmark, which like many other existing EU states, has imposed a two-year transition period, accepts certain professions such as doctors.

Britain, where salaries are high compared to Poland, where a junior doctor makes just 300 euros a month, can take in up to 60,000 doctors, according to the Internet site of another recruitment agency.

Malgorzata Pawlowicz, 35, an anaesthetist from Warsaw, does not hide the fact that she has chosen to live abroad "for financial reasons."

"To support my family, without any luxuries, I have to work 12 hours a day in three hospitals and in a private practice," said this single mother of two children.

Denmark "offers a very good salary and especially a normal life. I am at last going to be able to spend more time with my children and not work day and night, including Saturday and Sunday," she adds.

As well as doctors, nurses are also searching for job opportunities outside Poland. According to the Polish press, the United States could offer employment to up to 50,000 nursing staff from Poland.

The drain of medical staff could become a major problem for Poland. "If it continues, we'll have to get Ukrainian or Belarussian doctors who are ready to accept these paltry wages to come in our place," says Krzysliwski.

"But we have only one life and we cannot wait indefinitely for our situation to improve. If a country does not respect its specialists, it doesn't deserve them," he concludes with bitterness."

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