

British paediatrics

Overseas doctors' training

For many years British paediatricians have been welcoming overseas doctors to their hospitals for postgraduate training, and of some 270 paediatric registrars currently employed in the National Health Service (NHS) in England and Wales over 100 were born overseas. These posts have always offered good practical training, although their organisation has of necessity been haphazard.

In a memorandum on 'Overseas Doctors' Training' issued in January this year the British Paediatric Association (BPA) pointed out that in some regions many of the registrar posts occupied by overseas doctors are in danger of being lost in an attempt to correct the so called imbalance between training grades and career outlets. The Association calculates that for service needs about 300 paediatric registrar posts are likely to be required in England and Wales, but only 200 will be needed for training United Kingdom graduates. The remaining 100 posts would be suitable and could be used for training doctors from overseas.

In 1982 Sir David Innes Williams of the British Postgraduate Medical Federation put forward proposals for a National Overseas Doctors Sponsorship Organisation, which aimed to improve the training of overseas doctors and to control the standard and number of their training posts. It was clear at that time that such a scheme would only be acceptable to the profession as a whole if there were strict limitations on the duration of stay of sponsored

doctors, which changes in the immigration rules have now introduced.

A revised scheme formulated in 1984 proposed that the Council for Postgraduate Medical Education should undertake initial vetting of sponsored overseas postgraduates. The appropriate Royal College would advise them on the training they needed and indicate where they could find posts in the NHS that were reserved for the sponsored scheme. Scotland and Northern Ireland preferred to remain separate from the scheme and a number of official bodies, notably the Royal College of Psychiatrists, were unwilling to participate.

The BPA has approached Sir John Badenoch, who was appointed by the Royal College of Physicians of London (RCP), to coordinate the scheme, suggesting that some six or seven registrar posts in paediatrics be identified in each health region as sponsored training posts. It is expected that some overseas doctors will require general paediatric posts, while others will seek training in a paediatric specialty.

Further discussions are to be held between the BPA and the RCP regarding the feasibility of this scheme and its financing. In the meantime paediatricians will be asked for their response to the proposals and to indicate their willingness to allow existing posts to go into the scheme or to offer training in additional posts.

A D M JACKSON