

Pastures new

New Zealand doesn't train enough doctors. The UK appears to have too many. **Sabina Dosani** speaks to some who moved down under

About a third of doctors working in New Zealand obtained their primary medical qualification in another country. Half the emergency medicine, family planning and reproductive health, neurosurgery, palliative medicine, and psychiatry medics came from overseas. Three quarters of the neurosurgery intake came from abroad. I spoke to several UK trained doctors now working in New Zealand to find out how their experiences compare.

Workload halved

"My clinics have half the number of patients I would have seen in the UK," says Stuart Lee, consultant in diabetes and endocrinology at Auckland City Hospital. Stuart came to New Zealand in 2005 to take up a consultant post. His brother in law is an anaesthetist in Auckland and he knew from him that working life was much better.

"Auckland is particularly strong for those specialising in medicine as every specialty is represented here. Most UK hospitals wouldn't have all these specialties. Not only that, but I have a lower patient load and more time to do things." Stuart did not need to sit any further exams as he had a certificate of completion of specialist training (CCST), which was recognised as equivalent to local training.

Equivalent training

"New Zealand offers good experience, training equivalent to UK training, a good quality of life, and great schools for kids," enthuses Matt Dawes, consultant in general medicine at Auckland City Hospital. Matt came to New Zealand a year ago with his New Zealand born wife, whom he met in London when he was working as a specialist registrar.

After getting married and having children, Matt and his wife moved to Portsmouth where they had two sons. When his mother in law moved back to New Zealand, his wife felt increasingly isolated and missed home. They came to New Zealand for a holiday, with their young boys.

Better family life

"We realised that bringing up kids in Portsmouth wasn't great and we wanted a better family life," Matt recalls. He was also particular about finding a good job, and hadn't seen adverts for what he wanted. "I sent a cold email to the medical director," he explains, "and asked if there were any opportunities within general medicine, cardiovascular research, and pharmacology." The medical

director forwarded Matt's email to a local professor, who coincidentally happened to be looking for a person with those exact three interests and skills. Matt was offered the post after a telephone interview.

He describes the family's first year in New Zealand as hectic. "We had nowhere to live so stayed in a motel," he explains. "It was so unsettling for the boys. In the UK, however, things like buying a home, a car, sorting bank



Photos from Sabina's scrapbook



accounts happen over years, whereas when you move you have to do all that at once.” Matt’s fondest memory is the day their shipping container arrived and the boys were reunited with their missed toys. “It was like Christmas,” he says.

The Skype’s the limit

As far as relocating, Matt is hard pressed to identify any downsides. His parents have come to visit and regularly use text, phone, Skype, and email to stay in touch. “The cost

clinical director and consultant in general medicine and geriatrics who came to New Zealand in 1992 to take up a permanent position. He had been considering Australia, but the prospect of snakes deterred his wife.

David lists several advantages over working in the UK. “The main benefit is that I don’t work as hard as I would in the UK. I am able to practise more independently, there is less red tape, and better work-life balance.” David is passionate about fishing, so living near one of the best places in the

New Zealand, “This is a great place for a working holiday,” he says, “there are many opportunities, great training, and a high quality of medicine is practised.”

End of enemas

Chris Occleshaw is one of four consultant cardiac radiologists in New Zealand. He came from the UK as a fellow in 1993, intending to stay a year or two and then spend a year in the US. After three months he knew he wanted to stay and was offered a consultant

post that he took with the proviso that he be permitted a year’s leave to go to the US as planned. He hasn’t looked back.

Chris trained in Cambridge and wanted to be a teaching hospital radiologist. However, there were no suitable jobs in the UK at the time. “I didn’t want to do barium enemas forever,” he explained. New Zealand has offered many opportunities, “Here you have more control over what you do,” says Chris. “For

instance, it is easier to negotiate the job you want to do. Employers are more likely to tailor a post to your own interests. There is an expectation that doctors will train abroad and bring skills to New Zealand, and that causes this culture shift.” This flexible attitude has enabled Chris to innovate. He pioneered cardiac magnetic resonance scanning in Australasia and does development work for Siemens that he couldn’t have done in the UK. He recalls that in the UK, “management were reluctant to support innovation.”

Outdoor adventure

“There are many more opportunities for families,” says Chris, “they might miss out on Eurodisney, but they will have a level of outdoor life and adventure that you don’t have back home.”

He acknowledges moving hemispheres is a big step, “It’s a brave thing taking on a permanent job, but why not have a year or two here, have a look, get yourself known, and then decide.”

Competing interests. SD has been working as a consultant psychiatrist for the Auckland District Health Board since February 2007 and loves the job, beaches, relaxed laidback lifestyle, and clean air.

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of living in Auckland is high relative to your salary,” he says, but feels that this would also be the case in London.

Stuart has found New Zealand’s junior doctors different. “Registrars are inexperienced here,” he says, “and I miss the independence of SpRs back home. Because clinics are smaller, you are less dependent on registrars though, so it balances out and isn’t a major disadvantage.”

Greater autonomy

“We chose New Zealand because of the absence of snakes,” laughs David Spriggs,



world for trout fishing is a bonus. Adding, “This is a great country to bring up kids. There is an excellent public education system,” he says. He does, however, miss friends and family in the UK and is considering a job swap with a UK doctor, allowing him to spend time with loved ones. He would encourage newly qualified doctors to spend time in