

The *Melbourne Manifesto* in the 21st century: Progress at Cebu

The Wonca Working Party on Rural Health met in Cebu, Philippines in February 2011. The secretary of the working party, Dr John Wynn-Jones, writes on revisiting the “Melbourne Manifesto” and developing the “Cebu Strategies”.

Is it possible to have an ethical international recruitment policy, especially when doctors move from one country to another, in search of a better life and greater career opportunities? Taking a simple moral stance on recruitment might not be as simple as it may seem.

There are few countries in the world that are not affected one way or another by international medical recruitment. Some countries are losing crucial numbers of their trained medical manpower, to the point that they are unable to provide a comprehensive service to their population. These countries spend scarce resources training doctors, to see many leave to work in more developed health care systems. Why is it that some of the most sophisticated health services around the world benefit from this inequity instead of training adequate numbers of doctors to meet their own needs.

The *Melbourne Manifesto* was established at the Wonca World Rural Health conference, in Melbourne, in 2002. At that time, no coherent code existed which sought to address the exodus of trained health care professionals from countries in the developing world, to countries in the developed world, where resources were plentiful but where governments were reluctant to invest in training sufficient numbers of their own health workforce.

The manifesto identified the conflicting interests and laid out the responsibilities of governments, professional organisations and recruitment agencies around the world. It was one of the first attempts at developing an ethical code for those involved recruitment. The document remains robust and relevant; and its significance is reflected in the number of times that it is referenced in the academic literature and policy initiatives.

The six principles of the *Melbourne Manifesto* still remain relevant today:

1. It is the responsibility of each country to ensure that it is producing sufficient Health Care Professionals (HCPs) for its own current and future needs; is retaining them; and is planning for both rural and urban areas.
2. International recruitment is related to an inability on the part of individual countries to satisfy their own workforce needs.
3. The principles of social justice and global equity, the autonomy and freedom of the individual, and the rights of nation states, all need to be balanced.
4. Integrity, transparency and collaboration should characterise any recruitment of HCPs.
5. International exchanges of HCPs are an important part of international health care development.
6. Countries that produce more HCPs than they need, may continue this contribution to global health care.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) developed its own *Global Code of Practice*, which was adopted by the World Health Assembly in 2010. The WHO code stresses that “international recruitment of health personnel should be conducted in accordance with the principles of transparency, fairness and mutuality of benefits”. It goes on to state that “in developing and implementing international recruitment policies, Member States should strive to ensure that the balance of gains and losses of health personnel migration should have a net positive impact on the health systems of developing countries and countries with economies in transition” and “such measures may include the provision of effective and appropriate technical assistance, support for health personnel retention, support for training in source countries that is appropriate for the disease profile of such countries, twinning of health facilities, support for capacity building in the development of appropriate regulatory frameworks, access to specialized training, technology and skills transfers, and the support of return migration, whether temporary or permanent”. The *Melbourne Manifesto* is now eight years old: much has changed around the world and members of the original drafting team decided to review its relevance in the 21st century. Both codes are robust enough but we need to ensure that they are implemented internationally in the spirit of the WHO declaration, which aims to ensure that “the losses of health personnel migration should have a net positive impact on the health systems of developing countries and countries with economies in transition”.

The Wonca Working Party on Rural Health met at the World Rural Health and Wonca Asia Pacific conferences in Cebu City, Philippines in February this year. The working party conducted two open interactive workshops, aimed at developing a number of strategies designed to promote the manifesto and implement its recommendations. The five *Cebu Strategies* were presented and commended to the conference delegates in the closing ceremony, where they were unanimously adopted.



Wonca Working Party on Rural Health meet in Cebu
 Back row (l to r) Oliver Smith, Ian Couper (chair), Ian Cameron, Christos Lionis, John Wynn-Jones, Jo Scott-Jones, Muhd Tauffik
 Front row (l to r) Ricardo Amaral Filho, Aileen Riel- Espina, Dora Patricia Bernal-Ocampo, Ilse Hellemann.

THE CEBU STRATEGIES

The five strategies were

- Develop measurable indicators by which countries can be assessed on their compliance with the principles of the manifesto. (score card)
- Promote *Social Accountability of Medical Education* in order to ensure that doctors are trained appropriately to meet the needs of the communities in which they are trained.
- Support for health care professionals by sharing resources and educational programmes between the developed and developing world and encourage bilateral time limited exchanges.
- Engage with recruiting organisations with the aim of developing a code of conduct for the recruitment industry
- Market the *Melbourne Manifesto* and its aims more comprehensively

The Wonca Working Party on Rural Health is looking to engaging widely with NGOs, professional bodies, national governments, etc, in order to promote the five strategies over the next two to three years.

We struggle to manage a trend, which has always existed whereby people migrate in search of a better life. Globalisation and the ease of international travel have transformed a steady flow into a flood. We now face a growing dilemma where the developed world spends massive amounts on international aid and at the same time plunders the scare resources of the countries that they are trying to help.

Ian Couper
 Chair WWPRH