

## Harnessing Nigeria's medical talent: a case for strategic doctor export training

In the global healthcare landscape, Nigeria stands as a reservoir of immense medical talent. Yet, paradoxically, this talent often migrates abroad due to various challenges within the country's healthcare system.<sup>1</sup> While the departure of skilled doctors presents a loss to the nation, it also represents an opportunity if managed strategically. It is time for Nigeria to embrace the reality of doctor export and invest in comprehensive training programs tailored for global standards, thereby not only addressing local deficiencies but also contributing to global healthcare needs.

The massive exodus of Nigerian doctors to foreign shores now tagged the 'Japa Syndrome' is not merely a brain drain; it is a symptom of systemic issues within the country's healthcare infrastructure.<sup>2,3</sup> Factors such as inadequate facilities, low remuneration, limited career advancement opportunities, and security concerns have been identified as significant contributors to this exodus.<sup>4,5</sup> Recently some Nigerian politicians made statements insinuating that the government should train more doctors and export them abroad to get "repatriation of money." "This did not go down well with the medical community."<sup>7</sup> However, rather than viewing this trend solely through a lens of loss, Nigeria can reframe it as an opportunity to leverage its abundant human capital for both domestic and international benefit.<sup>8</sup> Experts have stated that in addition to measures to mitigate the brain drain such as policies that attract private sector funds to healthcare including taxation and levies, Nigeria can toe the paths of countries like Cuba to extract gain and generate more earnings.<sup>9</sup>

Investing in training programs designed specifically for export can yield multiple benefits. First and foremost, such initiatives would enhance the skills and expertise of Nigerian doctors to meet global standards.<sup>9,10</sup>

This would involve not only medical training but also proficiency in communication, cultural sensitivity, and ethical considerations relevant to practicing medicine in diverse international settings. By ensuring that Nigerian doctors are well-prepared for the demands of global healthcare, the nation can enhance its reputation as a source of top-tier medical professionals.

Moreover, strategically training doctors for export can alleviate the strain on Nigeria's domestic healthcare system.<sup>11</sup> By encouraging doctors to gain experience abroad and then return home, Nigeria can create a cadre of professionals with international exposure and expertise. These returning doctors can contribute to capacity building within local healthcare institutions, introduce best practices from abroad, and drive innovation in healthcare delivery.

Furthermore, exporting trained doctors can be a significant source of revenue for Nigeria.<sup>10</sup> Instead of viewing doctor migration as a loss, the country can establish mechanisms to benefit from the expertise of its diaspora. This could include partnerships with foreign healthcare institutions, placement agencies, or government-to-government agreements that facilitate the export of medical services. By monetizing the export of medical expertise, Nigeria can turn brain drain into brain gain.

Of course, such strategies cannot be achieved without efforts to address the root causes of doctor migration. There must be systemic reforms to improve working conditions, enhance infrastructure, and provide competitive compensation for healthcare professionals. Furthermore, measures to create a conducive environment for research, innovation, and career advancement within the country are essential to retaining talent in the long term. The critical question however is 'Can Nigeria effectively train doctors for export?' The

concept holds promise, yet it is not devoid of challenges.

In conclusion, training Nigerian doctors for export represents a strategic opportunity for the country to harness its abundant medical talent for both domestic and international benefit. By investing in the professional development of her doctors, Nigeria can retain its valuable human capital, alleviate pressure on the domestic healthcare system, and generate revenue through the export of medical expertise. However, such initiatives must be part of a broader strategy that addresses the underlying challenges driving doctor migration as well as creating an enabling environment for healthcare professionals to thrive within Nigeria.

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