

FAH Participates in New Initiative on the Ethical Recruitment of Foreign-Educated Nurses

By Patricia Pittman, Ph.D., Interim Chair of the Alliance for Ethical International Recruitment Practices

Hospitals, faced with growing clinician shortages, have looked to recruitment of foreign-educated health professionals, including nurses, to supplement the domestic health care workforce. The passage of health reform is expected to further increase the need for qualified health professionals in the coming years with the expansion of insurance coverage to an estimated 32 million Americans who currently lack health insurance.

While migration of health professionals is an inevitable and potentially mutually beneficial part of globalization, concerns have been raised around the world about the active recruitment of foreign-educated nurses. These concerns include the impact of this activity on source countries' health systems, the labor rights of nurses being recruited and the adequacy of clinical and cultural orientation programs once they arrive in the United States.

The new, nonprofit Alliance for Ethical International Recruitment Practices (Alliance) (<http://www.fairinternationalrecruitment.org/>) aims to address these issues and ensure that recruitment practices of foreign-educated nurses to the United States are ethical, responsible, and transparent.

In 2008 a broad range of stakeholders, including employers, unions, professional associations, foreign nurse associations, recruiters, and licensure and regulatory bodies jointly developed the *Voluntary Code of Conduct for the Ethical Recruitment of Foreign-Educated Nurses to the United States* (http://www.fairinternationalrecruitment.org/index.php/the_code/). The multi-stakeholder Alliance was created to promote and monitor compliance with this Code. The FAH, together with representatives from the American Hospital Association and Johns Hopkins University Health System, represent the "employer" segment of the Alliance Board.

Employers, placement agencies, and staffing agencies that recruit foreign-educated nurses are eligible to "subscribe" to the Code. Following a simple application process that certifies them as subscribers, they are asked to distribute the Code to new hires and invite them to participate in a series of three confidential surveys administered by the Alliance that aim to verify adherence to the Code's practices. Should a compliance issue arise, a period of remediation is initiated, during which further information is collected and the Alliance encourages resolution of the problem.

Recruiters believe that this simple certification and monitoring process will help distinguish them from their competition in the eyes of potential clients. Hospitals and foreign nurses expect that the subscriber list will indeed provide them with information that will help them select the best companies.

The Alliance is conducting an initial pilot phase and is proud to announce its first two subscribing organizations, both of which are among the nation's largest staffing and placement companies. Three additional companies are in different stages of the application process.

The Alliance is also working with interested parties in developing a response to the recent WHO Code of Practice on the recruitment of health personnel. The Code of Practice is the first such action that the WHO has taken on an international health issue since its 1981 initiative on basic standards for infant formula. As a party to the WHO agreement, the U.S. government is expected to develop standard data on workforce migration and to report on immigration of health professionals every three years. The multi-stakeholder Alliance is likely to be a prominent player in any national adherence strategy.

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