Thinking about working overseas?

Toolkit for GPs planning to work abroad

Created by the RCGP Junior International Committee, 2016
Introduction

Many GPs plan to work abroad either to start their career afresh elsewhere, to take a year out to experience a new environment or to volunteer their skills to those in need. This toolkit gives advice about what needs to be done prior to leaving the UK with regard to registration, licensing, appraisal and revalidation as well as other useful tips and things to consider while planning for your new role.
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1. Getting started

Here are some practical tips to help you ensure you make the most of your experience.

1. Start planning early
   - Give yourself at least 12 months.
   - Consider the best time to take a career break.
   - Contact the post-graduate dean if you are taking time out of programme.
   - Review your skills and qualifications – do you need time to attend extra training courses?
   - Consider financial issues – do you need funding? How will you pay the mortgage?
   - Discuss with family and friends early – are there any big events that you may miss?

2. Decide where you want to go and what you want to do
   - Think outside the box and beyond popular destinations/posts.
   - Have realistic objectives and expectations.
   - Consider Health Education England’s ‘deanery-run’ posts first if taking time OOP.
   - Choose international organisations with a good reputation and track record.

3. Do your homework
   - Join the RCGP Junior International Committee Google Group and use this as a resource.
   - Attend international events in the UK, for example, the THET annual conference or RCGP Global Health Conference
   - Speak to doctors who have already worked in your chosen area – consider appointing a mentor.
   - Research the country you have chosen, the health system, the politics, the local environment and the language (plan to learn it!)
   - Consider how you will fulfill requirements for appraisal and revalidation.
   - Research vaccinations, travel insurance, medical indemnity, license to practise.

4. Be realistic
   - Set yourself achievable objectives for the time you have.
   - Appreciate that it will take some time to adapt to a new culture and way of working.
   - Be aware that you may be faced with difficult situations and unrealistic expectations - how will you cope if you are asked to work beyond your level of competence?
   - Think about ethical implications of specific projects that you plan to work on and the local impact, together with potential sustainability of any development or relief work. If you are considering going abroad to volunteer you may want to take into account how your work affects the country you are travelling to. Below is an article that discusses this: bjgp.org/content/64/623/272
   - Sometimes attitudes take a long time to change, and adapt to.
5. Be flexible
- Be prepared for plans to change before and during your time away.
- Practices, systems and work ethic may be vastly different from the NHS – don’t get frustrated if things don’t work the way you feel they should.

6. Be safe
- Assess your personal needs – e.g. don’t pick a rural placement if you rely on the resources of a city.
- Take steps to avoid burning out – pressures can be more intense abroad and hours of work may not be regulated. Make sure you have personal time and space, plan for breaks and holidays.
- Know where to seek guidance and senior support – try to identify a local person on your placement (e.g. a fellow ex-pat) who understands the inevitable stress and frustrations.
- If going to a conflict zone, go with a recognised agency that offers training in both security and humanitarian laws and practice.

7. Spread the word
- Write a blog or an article.
- Do a presentation.
- Thank those who supported you.

8. Keep thinking globally and acting locally
- Reflect on your time abroad on your return to the NHS. How will your experience shape your future and possibly the future of others?
2. GMC

How to proceed with registration and licensing is dependent on how long you are planning to be away and whether or not you want to relinquish your licence.

Over 12 months overseas?

OPTION 1: Relinquish your licence to practise.

With this option you do not need to do revalidation, you can remain on the register and it reduces your annual retention fee. As a GP you would come off the performers list without a licence. Giving up your licence is free and your name will remain on the GP register. To get the licence back you will need to provide evidence from places you have worked and certificates of good standing from the regulators you have been registered with in the past 5 years. This can take some time & may delay returning to work.

How to relinquish your license:

1. Go to www.gmc-uk.org
2. login to ‘GMC online’
3. Click ‘my registration’ in the menu on the left hand side
4. Click ‘my applications’
5. To relinquish your licence to practise, click apply

There is also the option to relinquish your registration which would relinquish your license automatically however remaining on the register may be beneficial: It shows you are in good standing, however once you leave you can only get a certificate of past good standing.

www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/registration_applications/relinquish_licence.asp

Option 2: Do not relinquish your licence to practise. This is strongly advised. You may be eligible for a 50% discount on your fee if your income falls below a certain threshold.

If you want to maintain your licence to practise you will need to do annual appraisals as well as revalidation. As you will have no designated body you will need to do an annual return process and submit directly to the GMC.

The annual return form must contain:

a) Details of an appraisal in the last 12 months based on the good medical practise framework and supporting information that you have collected. The appraiser must meet GMC criteria which includes:
   • being a licensed doctor with a connection to a designated body or Suitable Person
   • participating in revalidation
   • being trained in and having recent experience of delivering medical appraisals in the UK
b) Certificates of good standing

c) Provision of medical services statement

Annual return currently costs £200

The following link gives more information
www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/revalidation/23575.asp

You will also need to take part in revalidation every 5 years. As you will have no responsible officer to give a recommendation you will have to take a revalidation test in the year which you are due to revalidate. The cost of the exam is currently £1100. Call the GMC for more advice: 0161 923 6602

Less than 12 months overseas?

No need to relinquish your license or registration however you must still do appraisals and revalidation. In some overseas posts it will be relatively easy to collect information relevant to revalidation. You may have to adapt the collection process to fit the work that you are doing. If in doubt, discuss with your responsible officer for revalidation/appraisals prior to your trip.

RCGP Royal College of General Practitioners
3. Performers list

Before you go
If you relinquish your licence to practise you can no longer be on the national performers list and therefore would not be able to practise as a GP in the UK. Have an appraisal shortly before you leave. Speak to the appraisal team (via NHS England) about your plans before you leave. Practices can vary slightly across the UK so your Local Medical Committee (LMC) should be able to offer further guidance on how to remain on your local Performers List, in order to avoid reapplying. Being on a Performers List is also important as they provide your appraiser and once revalidation is underway they will appoint your responsible officer.

Whilst abroad
Keep an up to date portfolio of evidence while you are away in case you need it on your return. For example, write up any quality improvement work & teaching.

Returning to UK
Contact your local appraisal team (via NHS England/designated body) to apply to be placed back on the list. They may require additional information to make sure that you are up to date with your knowledge and depending on how long you are away and what work you did you may need to show extra evidence or do further training before going back on the list.

Less than two years overseas?
Less than 2 years away you should be able to go straight back on the performers lists but this is dependent on the appraisal team. RCGP recommends you discuss any proposal to include work performed abroad with your responsible officer in advance of revalidation dates. Performers lists are organized by NHS England.

www.performer.england.nhs.uk

For those volunteering abroad, Health Education England have created a toolkit to help you collect information:

Over two years overseas?

Doctors who have previously been on the GMC register and NHS England National Performers List (NPL) & who have worked abroad for over 2 years and up to 5 years may need to take part in the Induction and Refresher scheme. It can also support the safe introduction of overseas GPs who have qualified outside the UK and have no previous NHS experience.

Firstly there is increased financial support from November 2016 that will:

- Increase the monthly bursary for GPs on the I&R scheme to £3,500. This will be available to new or existing GPs on the scheme.
- Provide a time limited financial top up to the bursary of £1,250 to assist with the costs of indemnity whilst on the scheme (available until 31 October 2018).
- Provide a time limited reimbursement (worth £464) to GPs on the scheme for the costs of GMC membership and DBS fees (available until 31 October 2018).
- Remove assessment fees for first time applicants (worth up to £1,000).

Increased practical support means from September 2016, there will be a new national support team for the scheme, based in Liverpool. The team will provide each I&R GP with a dedicated account manager and contact point to support them through the entire process. The team will also provide support including:

- Assistance and advice with completing forms and paperwork
- Assistance with arranging occupational health assessments
- Advice on arranging indemnity
- Co-ordinating assessments and placements on behalf of GPs

Finally, to make it easier for GPs to return to practice and cutting down the time involved, the process will be made more flexible. NHS England will continue to will work with stakeholders and local teams on four key areas:

- National guidance on approving GPs for the Medical Performers List. Existing criteria will be revised if required, in consultation with key stakeholders.
- Required steps in the local assessment, including interviews and references.
- Regional and/or national oversight of decisions.
- National funding for an on-going support and mentorship of GPs recommended for immediate inclusion on the Medical Performers List.
- For those doctors still needing to complete the I&R process, and scoring the highest bands on the I&R assessments, they will work with Health Education England to reduce the length of placements and the need for these doctors to sit the simulated surgery.

NHS England will also provide additional funding by April 2017 to increase the frequency of assessments under the I&R scheme from quarterly to bi-monthly. This will mean that GPs on the scheme have less time to wait until they can sit next the next round of assessments.

Further resources

- gprecruitment.hee.nhs.uk/induction-refresher
- england.nhs.uk/commissioning/primary-care-comm/gp-workforce/gp-induction/
4. Medical indemnity

The three main defence organisations all give varying cover when you go abroad to work and you will need to discuss this with them before you leave. They do not cover all countries and may not be able to cover all the work you do. For example MDU states it will give indemnity to GPs for less than three months if the work is mainly teaching and you have an agreement with them before you leave.

5. RCGP membership

Contact the membership team to discuss potential reduced membership costs for those working in resource poor settings.  
**RCGP Membership Services Department**
30 Euston Square
London
NW1 2FB
Email: membership@rcgp.org.uk
Tel: 020 3188 7766
6. Qualifications

Pre-departure training

- Currently there is very little training in global health issues in the general practice curriculum. If you also consider that most doctors arrange work overseas independently it is possible that they can undertake work without any formal qualification or experience to prepare them. The risk is that a lack of formal training and mentorship can lead to inadequately prepared doctors working in difficult environments. This may reduce benefit to the doctor and the host organisation and crucially introduces the possibility of creating harm.

- Currently the Health Education England ('Deanery') run OOPEs do provide pre-departure training and provide ongoing contact and mentorship. Good international organisations (eg VSO, MSF) will also provide pre-departure and in-country training and support. These organisations will also ask for a certain level of clinical experience as well as post-graduate training before allowing doctors to work with them.

- If considering humanitarian work in low or middle income countries there are courses available through RedR. www.redr.org.uk/


- Margaret Pyke runs a course on Sexual and Reproductive issues in the developing world for volunteer clinicians. www.margaretpyke.org/srhvols/srhvols.html

Further training

- Completing the Diploma in Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (DTM+H) is widely recognised as one of the best ways to prepare. This course if offered by the London and Liverpool Schools of Tropical Medicine. In addition the London school of Tropical Medicine have now successfully piloted an African DTM+H, based in both Tanzania and Uganda. This provides a really exciting opportunity to combine learning with a wealth of practical experience in an African setting. The DTM+H runs for three months at varying times of the year. Many areas are covered including practical diagnostics, tropical medicine/infectious disease theory and practice and public health aspects. The other main attraction of the course is that it involves doctors from all over the world, providing the opportunity to learn alongside doctors who have been exposed to vastly different training and working conditions. Achieving the DTM+H often naturally moves on to work overseas.

- If you want to take your level of training a step further there are also Masters courses available, which may involve time overseas in order to carry out the research component. Think widely and consider topics outside of public/global health to include medical education or economics. Such areas of expertise may be very relevant to global health.
Medical qualifications

- Each country will have a unique medical system designed to meet its own medical needs. UK grades may not have an exact equivalent in another country. Make sure that you get as much information as you can about the duties and responsibilities of the position. If it is a training job check the training structure as a whole, before signing a contract. National medical associations can provide general information on career structure.

- Prior to departure it is important to find out the process of registering as a doctor in a new country and to have your qualifications assessed to determine the equivalence in that country.

- It is important that once you decide which country you are going to you check if your medical degree is acceptable there and whether you need to do any other exams. For instance to work in Canada you will need to do the Medical Council of Canada Evaluating Examination (MCCEE).

- You will then need to register with the medical regulatory body. Some countries do not differentiate between registration and license to practise however depending on where you go you may need to apply for each of these separately. Also in some countries you may need to apply to a central medical regulatory body or you may have to register with a regional office in the area you intend to work. Therefore it is important to determine this as soon as possible. This can be done by contacting the medical regulatory body of the country you are going to work in.

- To work as a GP you will then need to have your specialty qualifications assessed. Some countries such as Australia and New Zealand will accept the CCT qualification.

- For example if you decide to move to Australia you should apply to the RACGP. Their Specialist Pathway Program will assess previous training and experience in general practice for international medical graduates and this will award you the Fellowship of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (FRACGP) which will allow you to work unsupervised as a GP in Australia.

Useful links: www.bma.org.uk/advice/career/going-abroad/working-abroad
7. Advice for GPs in training

**OOPE**

GP trainees can gain a great deal from the opportunities provided by working/training in a developing country. The Out of Programme Experience (OOPE) gives GP trainees a unique opportunity to take a year out of training to work in a different setting, which will enhance competencies, improve confidence and equip GP trainees to become future leaders with the profession.

Many ‘Deaneries’ are actively encouraging these either through Global Health Fellowships or through a range of one year quality assured posts in countries ranging from South Africa to Zambia and India, which are advertised at the time of recruitment to GP training.

African Health placement
ahp.org.za/
https://gprecruitment.hee.nhs.uk/Recruitment/GHF

**Global health competencies**

A 2016 three-stage consultation funded by the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and coordinated by the Intercollegiate Global Health Junior Doctors Working Group defined the global health competencies for postgraduate doctors across specialities as:

- **Competency 1**: Diversity, human rights and ethics
- **Competency 2**: Environmental, social and economic determinants of health
- **Competency 3**: Global epidemiology of disease
- **Competency 4**: Global health governance
- **Competency 5**: Health systems and health professionals

This paper in International Health details these competencies:
Walpole et al., 2016, *Time to go global: a consultation on global health competencies for postgraduate doctors*
inthehealth.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2016/05/29/inthehealth.ihw019.short?rss=1
8. Personal health and wellbeing

Checklist

- Do you need vaccinations?
- Do you need anti-malarials?
- Do you have any long term medical conditions? How will these be followed up?
- Do you have enough medications to cover your trip? How will you get more?
- How and where will you access emergency health care?
- What is the healthcare structure?
- Do you have travel insurance to cover all settings and activities? It is important to note that some insurers will not cover infectious diseases contracted whilst working.

You should also consider the impact of living away from your home and family on your mental health, especially if you are in a remote area and have never lived abroad before. You may find yourself feeling lonely or stressed. It is important therefore to have a good support structure in your new country and back home you can turn to if you need help. Consider networking with other volunteers in the area for peer support.

Pre-travel health advice

- **Fit for Travel:** [www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk)
  Travel health information website provided by NHS Scotland.

- **Hospital for Tropical Diseases: Department of Travel Medicine and Travel Clinic:** [www.thehtd.org/travelclinic](http://www.thehtd.org/travelclinic)
  Tel: 020 7388 9600        Fax: 020 7383 4817 (for appointments)

- **National Travel Health Network and Centre**  [www.nathnac.org](http://www.nathnac.org)

- **Royal Free Travel Health Centre**  [www.travelclinicroyalfree.com](http://www.travelclinicroyalfree.com)
  Tel: 020 7830 2885 (for appointments)

- **Trailfinders Travel Clinic:** [www.trailfinders.com/travelessentials/travelclinic](http://www.trailfinders.com/travelessentials/travelclinic)
  194 Kensington High Street, London, W8 7RG, Tel: 020 7938 399

- **The Travel Doctor:** [www.traveldoctor.co.uk/clinics](http://www.traveldoctor.co.uk/clinics)
  Details of various travel clinics around the UK.

- **Medics Travel:** [www.medicstravel.co.uk](http://www.medicstravel.co.uk)
9. Personal Finances

When deciding whether to travel and work abroad it is vital to consider personal and professional finances. It is important to understand the likely differences in wages or volunteer stipend, costs of living and any existing financial commitments, such as insurance policies (property, life, medical, car) and direct debits.

Pensions
When you stop working for the NHS, contributions will not be paid into the NHS pension scheme however you may be able to continue contributing yourself. Also depending on whom you work for abroad you may be able to approve your new employer and remain in the NHS pension scheme. Further information and guidance from the NHS Pension Scheme (www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk) and the BMA (www.bma.org.uk).

Mortgage
Many lenders offer the option of a mortgage holiday that allows you to temporarily stop or reduce your monthly mortgage repayments if you are volunteering.

Maternity leave
Time abroad will count as a break in NHS services so will affect maternity benefit. However, the BMA states this can be disregarded in certain circumstances (period of up to 12 months spent abroad as part of a definite programme of postgraduate training on the advice of the postgraduate dean or college or faculty adviser in the specialty concerned, or a period of voluntary service overseas with a recognised international relief organisation for a period of 12 months).

National insurance
You will carry on paying UK National Insurance for the first 52 weeks you’re abroad if you’re working for an employer outside the EEA, Switzerland and bilateral Social Security agreement countries, and you meet the following conditions:

- your employer has a place of business in the UK
- you’re ordinarily resident in the UK
- you were living in the UK immediately before starting work abroad

www.gov.uk/national-insurance-if-you-go-abroad

Continuing to pay NI will allow you to protect your state pension and entitlements to other benefits which will be beneficial if you are planning to return to the UK. Depending on where you work and whether you are self employed or not there will be differences in how and what you pay.
**Fundraising**

Many organisations expect you to personally raise funds towards the placement. You will need to think about how you are going to fund your work especially if you are not going to be earning any money. There are various institutions which provide grants and funds which you can apply for.

- The RCGP offers International Travel scholarships ranging from £200 - £2000. [www.rcgp.org.uk/rcgp-nations/rcgp-international/international-opportunities.aspx](http://www.rcgp.org.uk/rcgp-nations/rcgp-international/international-opportunities.aspx)
- The Claire Wand Fund has travel scholarships available to GPs. [www.clairewand.org/](http://www.clairewand.org/)
- The BMA has humanitarian funds to help teams working in developing countries [www.bma.org.uk/collective-voice/influence/international-work/humanitarian-fund](http://www.bma.org.uk/collective-voice/influence/international-work/humanitarian-fund)
- Online databases can identify grant making organisations [trustfunding.org.uk/](http://trustfunding.org.uk/)
10. Security

It is important to assess the risks you might face when you go to work abroad and to consider if you are happy to accept them. These risks may include crime, sexual assault, conflict or even road safety. Security risks vary from country to country and also varies depending on the type of job you are going to do e.g. going to work in a conflict zone.

There are several ways to look for information about crime and security risks in your country of choice:

1. GOV.UK gives a good overview of the security risks in different countries in their section on foreign travel advice. www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice
2. Websites of the local embassies also give details about security issues
3. Travel guides usually have sections on security but you need to make sure they are up to date
4. The Overseas Security Advisory Council is an American site which gives information on current security issues around the world www.osac.gov
5. The WHO 2013 Global Status Report on Road Safety gives information on accident statistics around the world www.who.int

Once in country it is important to know what to do in an emergency so make sure you know the contact details of the emergency services if they have them or have someone you can contact if you need to.

It is useful to register with your embassy in your new country as soon as you arrive as they can provide help and assistance if you need it.

It is important to be more aware of your surroundings in a new environment and to stay alert. Try to find out about any possible risks and become familiar with local customs especially if you are in a country that is very different to where you are from. You should also think about security in your home and consider if you need to install stronger security measures where you live for example bars on your windows or a burglar alarm.
11. Further resources

1. BMA resource covering the steps on working abroad
   www.bma.org.uk/advice/career/going-abroad/working-abroad

2. General advice on volunteering abroad
   www.bma.org.uk/advice/career/going-abroad/volunteering-abroad

3. The Gold Guide was created to give guidance on specialty training in the UK. It includes a section on taking time out of programme discussing the types of OOPE and how to gain approval for it.

4. Article written by a GP trainee who completed an OOPE describing their experiences.

5. A GPST2 gives advice on taking a year out during training

6. Advice from the London 'deanery' on how to organise OOPE in their deanery for GP trainees and what they have to offer.

7. This guide gives information on the evidence required for appraisal and revalidation for GPs.


   www.thrive.or.ug/resources/EA%20DTMH%20Leaflet.pdf

10. GMC Guidance for EU doctors on how to work as a GP in the UK .www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/WelcomeUK.asp#Welcome
12. Relevant organisations

- International Service www.internationalservice.org.uk
- Médecins du Monde or Doctors of the World www.doctorsoftheworld.org.uk
- Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) www.msf.org.uk
- Progressio www.progressio.org.uk
- RedR UK www.redr.org.uk
- Skillshare International www.skillshare.org
- Student Partnership Worldwide www.spw.org
- Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) www.vso.org.uk
- Primary Care International (PCI) is a social enterprise launched by Red Whale to help healthcare providers to combat the growing threat of NCDs worldwide by delivering evidence-based training and strategic support across a range of settings worldwide. www.gp-update.co.uk/Social-enterprise
- Alma Mata www.almamata.net
  Alma Mata is a UK based Global Health Network. Its objective is to facilitate the development of clearer pathways for postgraduate education and careers in international health. It aims to do this through publications, lectures, conferences and by acting as a forum for the sharing of research and ideas.
- Medact www.medact.org
  Medact is a UK based global charity made up of health professionals. Through campaigning and lobbying it undertakes education, research and advocacy roles related to health issues that are a result of conflict, development and environmental changes.
- RCGP Junior International Committee:
  Please see our website for more info: www.rcgp.org.uk/jic where we advertise global health opportunities.
  We also have a newsletter, which you can subscribe to via googlegroups: junior-rcgp-international-committee@googlegroups.com.
  Follow us via facebook: www.facebook.com/#!/groups/283366895074748/?bookmark_t=group
  Twitter: ’rcgpjic’ and our group ’GP opportunities in International Health’, - this group would be most useful for you as opportunities are posted for volunteer placements.
  See our promotional video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTa6CIZ

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