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CHALLENGES IN CERTIFICATION AND CREDENTIALING OF PAKISTANI PHYSICIANS IN MIDDLE EAST

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There are around 196,040 registered doctors with Pakistan Medical & Dental Council (PMDC) as per the statistics till April 30th, 2015⁽¹⁾ but limited data is available about Pakistani physicians pursuing medical careers abroad. Mostly specialists cadre doctors going Middle East for better career incentives, monetary benefits, rising hostilities, to avoid the deteriorating law and order situation in the last few years. There is no accurate data available that how many physicians working in Middle East i.e. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar & other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. One study estimated in 2005 that Pakistan had contributed about 13,000 medical graduates to USA, UK, Canada, and Australia.⁽²⁾ The annual net emigration of Pakistani physicians ranges from 1,000 to 1,500, of whom only 10-15% return, resulting in a net migration of 900 to 1,275 physicians every year.⁽³⁾ The major factor is the international recognition of PMDC and MBBS from Pakistan. Almost 90 PMDC-recognised medical colleges are listed on FAIMER International Medical Education Directory,⁽⁴⁾ which makes Pakistani medical graduates eligible to pursue their careers abroad by taking foreign licensing examinations. The Middle East and Gulf remain the destination of choice for Pakistani doctors. Saudi Arabia alone hired 2,500 doctors in 2010-12.⁽⁵⁾ The monetary incentives being offered to physicians at all stages of career are much more lucrative than what is being offered in Pakistan (pay package 5 to 10 times better than the Pakistani pay scale along with free return tickets, accommodation and allowances etc. for each category).⁽⁶⁾ In the previous years the working by the credentialing body PMDC & with the proactive approach by the College of Physician & Surgeons of Pakistan (CPSP) the Pakistani's degrees been accredited in all the major countries like KSA, UAE, Qatar & other GCC countries. PMDC primarily regularly monitored the training & competence level across the country; they also have detailed regulations about the postgraduate qualifications structures.⁽⁷⁾ On the basis of PMDC credentialing the degrees been accredited abroad. Last year the health regulatory authorities in KSA, UAE & Qatar made changes in their certification & credentials structure. As the result

of these changes the status of Pakistan's postgraduate degrees went almost the bottom line specifically in UAE & even in Qatar as they only accept one degree from Pakistan, Qatar authorities even not accepting the official status of PMDC about the degrees status & its equivalency. These countries mostly get the healthcare human resource from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Philippines & Bangladesh. No doubt they preferred the western trained professionals (although the country of origin will be from these mentioned countries) even then the majority of the trained healthcare professionals been provided by these countries who completed their all educational credentials in their country of origin. After these new laws our concerned authorities didn't approach to concern as the result of that physicians holding specialist degrees are in fragile frame of mind i.e. who will stands for us & communicate to the relevant authorities. In the new healthcare Professionals Qualification Requirements (PQR), UAE put Pakistan's postgraduate degrees attained medical professionals in the lowest tier. Qatar Council for the Healthcare Practitioners (QCHP) only approved CPSP degree holders in the specialty certificates for the category of physicians no other postgraduate qualifications from Pakistan been yet accredited in Qatar. Only Saudi Commission for Health Specialities cater Pakistan postgraduate qualifications as per the PMDC credentialing structure⁽⁸⁾ although the postgraduate experience requirements are comparatively high comparing to other countries but a Pakistani trained postgraduate doctors can work up to consultant level only in KSA as per the newly Guideline of Professional Classifications and Registration for Health Practitioners Sixth Edition of 1435 AH/ 2014 AD.⁽⁹⁾ The authorities in UAE, according to the circular no. 43 in the month of December 2014 (reminder on June 1, 2015) unified doctors into three categories i.e. General Practitioner, Specialist & Consultant.⁽¹⁰⁾ This unified PQR 2014 by the Ministry of Health (MOH) UAE, Health Authority Abu Dhabi (HAAD) & Dubai Health Authority (DHA) (11) mentioned on page 24-25 about the qualification and experience requirements for physicians licensure. This showed it is divided into three tiers for the specialist & consultant cadre. On page 37 of this PQR highly prestigious clinical postgraduate

qualifications from Pakistan's placed into tier 3 (the lowest tier) even with wrong nomenclature. After seeing in detail this current PQR it is found that degrees from Pakistan's (FCPS/MD/MS) which will be awarded after the five years of structured training in the sub-speciality program(s) with the prerequisites of the approval of thesis/ dissertation (for MD program it should be internationally approved) are roped with two or three years training programs degrees from other countries like Macedonia, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Sri Lanka. While with the equal stature of the postgraduate training as well examination standards Indian degrees are placed in the second tier. (See page 32 of this PQR).⁽¹¹⁾ It is also need to mention that there are no postgraduate diplomas which are actually two year training base given by CPSP or Universities duly approved by the PMDC are part of this PQR of UAE. Qatar Council for the Healthcare Practitioners (QCHP) only recognized CPSP awarded degrees from Pakistan. After seeing their manual⁽¹²⁾ the Qatari authorities implicit that from Pakistan's only CPSP is the degree awarding authority no other degrees programs are run other than CPSP post graduation trainings. While from India MD/ MS/ DNB/DM/M.ch degrees are duly accredited. In this regard PMDC is complete silent to give details to the Qatar health authorities about the accredited postgraduate degrees in Pakistan, as the result of this the specialist jobs are limited for Pakistanis doctors in Qatar as compare to India doctors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1- PMDC shall issue formal apprehension to the Middle East licensing/ credentialing authorities (In UAE: DHA, HAAD & MOH; In Qatar: Supreme Educational Council of Qatar & Hamad Medical Corporation; Oman & KSA) that here in Pakistan PMDC is the official body for the post graduate degrees credentialing, its accreditation & equivalency.
- 2- PMDC should brief about the details of the accredited post graduate qualifications credentials to the Pakistan's Ministry of Health & GCC countries Pakistani consulate to have formal communication to the concerned authorities of these countries. This is the national duty of PMDC & consulates of Pakistan's in these countries to advocate & plea Pakistanis rights working abroad.
- 3- PMDC & CPSP shall work in coordination for the national cause in these countries; it needs to learn from India that in every country Indian almost five post graduate degrees are accredited.
- 4- PMDC shall immediately contact Qatar Council for the Healthcare Practitioners (QCHP) plea them that beside FCPS they shall accept & recognize MD/MS degree(s) from Pakistan.

- 5- PMDC & CPSP shall collectively persuade the UAE authorities that from Pakistan extremely qualified medical human resource serving UAE in highly professional manners at your country with ethics, loyalty & dedication. They shall upgrade FCPS/MD/MS degree(s) from tier three to the tier 2 as per the current PQR immediately.
- 6- PMDC shall communicate UAE & Qatar authorities, demand them to upgrade FCPS/MD/MS degree^(s) after five years of work experience at the Consultant level i.e. tier- 1. This already been done in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that the said degree (s) holders are working in the Consultant level.

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