

WORKING IN HEALTHCARE



If you are a trained healthcare professional there is plenty of scope to transfer your skills Down Under, writes **Leanne Short**

One of the key reasons for people to consider a move Down Under is the enhanced quality of life and well-being afforded by a sunny climate and plenty of space for all. The healthcare profession is something that we all need throughout our lives and if you are a trained healthcare professional you may be wondering if there is any scope to combine the two and transfer your skills Down Under.

The UK's National Health Service (NHS) is something we are justifiably proud of but there is no doubting that it is under pressure these days, with unacceptable waiting times for some treatments, a shortage of 'emergency' appointments at GPs, old buildings, staff working long hours and inadequate budgets that are becoming ever tighter. That said, is the devil you know better than the devil you don't know?

MEETING THE DEMAND

Investment in healthcare in Australia is at an all-time high, with new hospitals being built to cater for demand. In addition, healthcare professionals are being actively recruited from overseas with good





financial incentives for almost all sectors. Kate Moore is the International Consultant for Healthcare Australia (www.healthcareaustralia.com.au) in the London office.

She suggests: "At present there are not enough qualified professionals to meet demand across many of Australia's states. There is a particularly high demand for Theatre nurses (all kinds), Critical Care such as ICU/HDU, Oncology, and Midwifery. Doctors and Allied Health professionals, such as Sonographers, Radiographers, Physiotherapists, Audiologists, Osteopaths and Pharmacists are also in demand right across Australia."

As the Australian healthcare sector expands, the number of new, purpose-built hospitals follows suit.



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These are obviously task specific buildings, designed to benefit patients and make the working lives of healthcare professionals easier.

Even comparatively older buildings are well maintained and generally agreeable places for patients to recuperate in.

On the face of it Australia seems like a fantastic place to live and work if you're in the healthcare sector. You can expect fewer hours, more pay, better equipment, lower general living costs and better weather – but it's still a daunting fact that it is on the other side of the world. So how do you make this transition? You'll need a visa, you will need to be registered with AHPRA to practice, and you will need a job offer in place.

FINDING EMPLOYMENT

As with any area where there is a strong demand, but many complicated steps to satisfy and overcome, specialist agencies exist.

A good starting point would be to speak with a reputable migration

agency to check out your eligibility to obtain a visa and the visa options available to you.

Also, try talking to specialist healthcare agencies who can advise you on the variety of job vacancies and how they might differ to your current role.

Reputable agents will be able to assist in many ways, providing advice and additional value-added services above and beyond their core offerings, perhaps working in partnership with other industry professionals and assisting you with your registration so you are able to start employment on arrival.

Moving to Australia can be an emotional rollercoaster and a stressful time with much to think about – so ensure you select carefully and make good use of the agents out there and the support services they offer to make your Australian move an adventure!

Nursing agencies can help you secure employment, either as a bank nurse where you have flexibility to pick and choose your shifts to suit,

or in a permanent role, whichever suits your preference.

GETTING REGISTERED

Regardless of the type of visa you have opted for, AHPRA (Australian Healthcare Practitioner Registration Agency) registration, as the name implies, is critical to securing healthcare employment or at least commencing work.

As with most things, gaining registration is not something that happens overnight, with three months realistically about the minimum timeline.

On receiving your registration you are deemed fit to practice but will still be required to physically take your nursing qualifications and documentation to an AHPRA office on arrival in Australia for verification. For this reason, it's well worth applying to an AHPRA office in the state where you plan to take up residence (although this is not essential).

Eric Smith, managing director of the Australian Nursing Agency in Melbourne has a few pointers: "We see a high demand for nurses particularly in general, mental health and other specialty areas.

"This provides great opportunities, especially for those

on a working holiday visa or with permanent residency. Most public and private sector hospitals need help recruiting specialty nurses wanting permanent roles. As a consequence, we are starting to see some interest again for 457 sponsorships.

"Overseas professionals are frequently sourced through agencies for hospitals offering permanent positions. Taking agency work initially provides the freedom to work in different hospitals and find your feet, whilst deciding where you want to live and work."

Desiree Blicharz, a UK nurse who made the move Down Under, summarises the situation simply: "I came here because the NHS treats nurses so poorly and I was losing my love for the job! It's much better in Oz. I get on average A\$2,400 (£1,100) per fortnight, give or take if I've worked nights or many weekends. In England I was getting on average around £1,500 to 1,600 a month."

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

It's worth being aware of regional variations before planning your move as some areas of healthcare are more in demand in different states.

In fact there are clear financial incentives offered by some regions

to attract staff with certain specialisations. This is demonstrated in a recent article posted by Australia's *Health Times*, which analysed prospective salaries for nurses across Australia's regions.

The quoted 'Entry level' base salaries (i.e. with no account being taken for overtime allowances or agency rates) for a clinical nurse/midwife varied from A\$71,495 (£33,437) in Victoria to A\$82,433 (£38,547) in Western Australia. The maximums rose from A\$82,300 (£38,485) in Victoria to A\$91,650 (£42,856) in New South Wales. These are obviously subject to change and should be treated purely as a guide.

So it seems Australia offers a great healthcare system for those who work within it but who pays for this? Australia offers a hybrid system that sees taxes (known as Medicare) and insurance working in tandem.

For example, visiting the GP is not free (unless you earn below a certain amount) and you are required to pay a small fee to confirm your appointment.

In Australia the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) ensures that essential medicines are available to all Medicare-registered individuals at a subsidised price. Doctors are supplied with some medicines free of charge, so in emergencies these can be provided free to the patient.

Treatments such as optical, dental and the ambulance are not covered by Medicare so private medical insurance needs to be taken out to cover these costs or the patient can pay for their treatment as an out of pocket expense.

Medicare does however cover accidents and emergencies. Although potential one-off costs and out-of-pocket expenses may be higher, the Medicare levy is less than National Insurance contributions in the UK.

If you are a qualified medical professional working in the UK, this thriving and robust healthcare system could seem too good to be true, especially when you factor in some of the benefits of working within it.

Taking a registered nurse as an example, you could be working less hours (typical shift is 8.5 hours as opposed to 12) for, on average, twice the salary.

If that doesn't contribute to longevity and a better quality of life we're not sure what will. What's more, the nurse-to-patient ratio is better too, so nursing staff can spend more time with each patient.

Healthcare in Australia is certainly enjoying a strong period of growth. Those working in the healthcare sector in the UK have a very strong incentive to consider a move and their position is enviable.

Demand is high, salaries are very good and working conditions are more conducive to finding a better work-life balance.

■ Leanne Short is the UK manager of the ISA Group – Australian emigration and employment experts delivering advice, visas and vacancies to help you live and work Down under. For further information visit isagroupuk.co.uk or call 0333 577 0082.

