

Editorial title

Valuing internationally educated nurses and diversity in the community nursing workforce

Authors

Ben Bowers ^{1,2,3*}, Noor Ul Haq ⁴, Amanda Young ², Crystal Oldman ²

Affiliations

¹ Department of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom

² Queen's Nursing Institute, London, United Kingdom

³ Cardiff University, United Kingdom

⁴ Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust

Corresponding author:

*Ben Bowers, Primary Care Unit, Department of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Cambridge, East Forvie Building, Robinson Way, Cambridge, United Kingdom, CB2 0SR

Twitter: @Ben_Bowers__ @TheQNI @CrystalOldman

Email: bb527@medschl.cam.ac.uk

Valuing internationally educated nurses and diversity in the community nursing workforce

The contributions of internationally educated nurses are one of our under-recognised strengths in the community health and social care workforce. International colleagues possess valuable skills and expertise, multi-cultural perspectives and insights that strengthen patient-centred care and teams. The UK and many high-income countries actively recruit

international nurses to meet expanding healthcare needs.^{1,2} For example, healthcare services in the UK and Norway employ high proportions of people from overseas;^{3,4} many internationally qualified nurses work in care homes and increasingly in the community.^{1,4}

But do we really value the diversity and skillset of our international workforce? Sadly, evidence suggests we do not. Many internationally educated nurses experience deskilling and loss of status when they arrive in the UK.^{1,5,6} Nurses describe transitioning from highly experienced nurses in their countries of origin to providing predominantly basic care interventions, often working at unregistered nurses level, often equivalent to healthcare assistants, with limited opportunities to use their clinical expertise and progress their careers.^{5,6} Experiences of discrimination in the workplace, being marginalised, undervalued and overlooked by managers and nursing colleagues are all too commonplace in published studies.^{1,3,6,7}

Adjusting to new healthcare cultural norms, language differences and colloquialisms in new host countries takes time. Some clinical interventions and interactions with families, including relatives' roles and social responsibilities in providing care, can be very different to international nurses' countries of origin. This can come as a culture shock, especially in palliative and end-of-life care situations. The responsibility for supporting successful transitions and equal opportunities for international nurses lies with employers, managers and colleagues. Ugiagbe et al., (2023) highlights how this support is uneven or inadequate.⁸

Research to date consistently recommends instigating a range of concurrent strategies to value cultural diversity and support workplace integration. This includes preceptorship programmes, continual learning and career development opportunities, workshops for all staff on working cross-culturally and valuing diversity, alongside tailored long-term mentorship and buddy schemes for international nurses.^{1,6,9} NHS England, NHS Employers and numerous NHS Trusts are working together to support, develop and retain international educated nurses in different ways. These initiatives include the International Nurses' Recruitment Toolkit,¹⁰ Stay and Thrive programme and Pastoral Support Quality Award.¹¹

Recognising the need to act and better support international nurses in adjusting to working in the community, The Queen's Nursing Institute (QNI) partnered with NHS England to develop resources for providers employing internationally educated nurses, often for the first time.¹² In 2023, the QNI released a [film](#) showcasing the opportunities of working in the community as international nurses.¹³ These are useful starting points. However, evidence-based initiatives to develop, nurture and retain internationally educated nurses are needed.

The QNI has recently worked with Leeds Community NHS Health Care Trust to deliver a development programme specifically for internationally recruited nurses. Opportunities for career progression were discussed alongside practical advice on the UK recruitment process. The nurses on the programme had all been in the UK for longer than six months and they agreed that a period of settling into the NHS was needed before thinking about career progression. The use of person specifications in job descriptions was not culturally familiar and having the opportunity to look at transferrable skills in alignment to job descriptions was considered very useful. Opportunities for further education and training in community nursing was also reported as being beneficial as this was a new area of clinical practice for many of the internationally educated nurses on the development programme.

We have shared some promising initiatives and developments in meaningfully supporting internationally educated nurses in the community. These are primarily pilot projects and resources informed by expert consensus. Further high-quality research is needed to understand what works well in supporting successful transitions and equal career opportunities in community settings, especially from internationally educated nurses' perspectives. Nothing about us without us applies here; we need to empower and support internationally educated nurses to co-design and lead this important research.

Conflict of interest

None.

Funding sources

Ben Bowers is supported by the Wellcome Trust [225577/Z/22/Z].

References

1. Safari K, McKenna L, Davis J. Transition experiences of internationally qualified health care professionals: A narrative scoping review. *Int J Nurs Stud* 2022; 129: 104221.
2. Health Foundation. Thinking local and global: exploring the UK's reliance on international nurses and the impact of COVID-19, <https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/charts-and-infographics/thinking-local-and-global-exploring-the-uks-reliance-on-international-nurses> (2023).
3. Pendleton J. The experiences of black and minority ethnic nurses working in the UK. *Br J Nurs* 2017; 26: 37–42.
4. Debesay J, Arora S, Fougner M. Organisational culture and ethnic diversity in nursing homes: a qualitative study of healthcare workers' and ward nurses' experiences. *BMC Health Serv Res* 2022; 22: 843.
5. Adhikari R, Melia KM. The (mis)management of migrant nurses in the UK: a sociological study. *J Nurs Manag* 2015; 23: 359–367.
6. Smith PA, Allan H, Henry LW, et al. Valuing and recognising the talents of a diverse healthcare workforce. Report from the REOH Study: Researching equal opportunities for overseas-trained nurses and other healthcare professionals, https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Valuing_and_Recognising_the_Talents_of_a.html?id=NeOt0AEACAAJ&redir_esc=y (2006).
7. Alexis O, Vydellingum V, Robbins I. Engaging with a new reality: experiences of overseas minority ethnic nurses in the NHS. *J Clin Nurs* 2007; 16: 2221–2228.
8. Ugiagbe IM, Liu LQ, Markowski M, et al. A critical race analysis of structural and institutional racism: Rethinking overseas registered nurses' recruitment to and working conditions in the United Kingdom. *Nurs Inq* 2023; 30: e12512.
9. O'Callaghan C, Loukas P, Brady M, et al. Exploring the experiences of internationally and locally qualified nurses working in a culturally diverse environment. *Aust J Adv Nurs* 2018; 36: 23–34.
10. NHS Employers. *International retention toolkit*. NHS Employers. <https://www.nhsemployers.org/system/files/2024-05/international-retention-toolkit-1833.pdf> (2024)
11. NHS England. NHS Pastoral Care Quality Award – International nurses and midwives, <https://www.england.nhs.uk/nursingmidwifery/international-recruitment/nhs-pastoral-care-quality-award/> (2022).

12. Queen's Nursing Institute. International Recruitment – Support for Employers, <https://qni.org.uk/nursing-in-the-community/international-recruitment-to-the-community/support-for-employers/> (2024).
13. Queen's Nursing Institute. International nurses find a warm welcome in England, <https://vimeo.com/825763074> (2023).