

SA to recruit doctors from Tunisia

Representatives of the Tunisian Agency for Technical Cooperation have been in South Africa to inspect public health facilities, as part of helping to recruit Tunisian doctors to work in South Africa's under-serviced areas.

The delegation of senior representatives, led by the Agency's Deputy Director General Habib Ben Mansour, visited Prince Mshiyeni and Inkosi Albert Luthuli Hospitals in KwaZulu-Natal on Friday.

KwaZulu-Natal is one of the provinces that is expected to benefit from the initial phase of this recruitment drive together with the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and Northern Cape.

The Tunisian Agency for Technical Cooperation has a pool of more than 2000 health professionals that are available to work in countries that have cooperation agreements with Tunisia.

South Africa and Tunisia have an existing cooperation agreement on health signed in 1999.

The agreement was reaffirmed during a visit by Health Minister, Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang to Tunisia in 2004.

The delegation has received an extensive briefing on the conditions of service for health professionals in South Africa which will also apply to the potential recruits from Tunisia.

South African remuneration packages were found to be competitive.

The Tunisian delegation also visited facilities in Eastern Cape and Limpopo.

Their week-long visit to South Africa concluded with the signing of a Protocol on the Recruitment of Tunisian Doctors, signed between the national Department of Health and the Tunisian Agency for Technical Cooperation in Pretoria on Friday.

The recruitment of Tunisian doctors to South Africa will take the seven-year relationship between the two countries in the area of health to a higher level.

Between the years 2000 and 2002, Tunisian ophthalmologists visited South Africa to perform eye operations.

A total of 234 operations were performed in year 2000, 260 in 2001 and 176 in 2002.

The two countries have again revived the ophthalmologist programme and are looking into long-term plans to sustain it over

the next three years.

In January 2007, 171 eye operations were performed by Tunisian ophthalmologists at Butterworth Hospital in eGcuwa, in the Eastern Cape.

These initiatives affirm the commitment of both countries to the South-South development agenda and to further strengthen cooperation in other areas of health.

Recruitment of doctors from Tunisia is one of the short-term measures being taken by the Department of Health to address the challenge of an inadequate supply of doctors locally.

Long-term solutions - such as increasing training output and improving skills retention within the public health sector - are being intensified.

South Africa has a similar cooperative relationship in place with Cuba in the health care sector.

By July 2006, a total of 430 South African medical students had been enrolled in the programme with Cuba, as part of an agreement signed between the two nations in 1995.

The agreement also includes the recruitment of Cuban doctors to work in rural areas in South Africa.

After being selected for the training programme, the South African students study for five years in Cuba and write the National Final Cuban Examinations.

The trainee-doctors then return to South Africa on the sixth year to do their final clinical year and internship in various South African health-science faculties, particularly those in the under-resourced areas.

The students then sit for a South African examination with the rest of the country's medical students to qualify as doctors.

Through the Joint Bilateral Commission on Economic, Scientific, Technical and Business Cooperation, South Africa and Cuba collaborate in sectors including trade, investment, finance, mining, electricity, sport and recreation and science.

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