

What opportunities are available for Nepalese Psychiatrists in the UK?

Yugesh Rai^{1*}, Suresh Thapaliya², Ritesh Thapa³, Deoman Gurung⁴, Arati Thapa⁵, Shikha Upadhyay⁶

1. Specialty Doctor, Essex Partnership University NHS Trust, Essex, UK
2. Specialty Trainee, Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust, Kent, UK
3. Associate Specialist, Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust, UK
4. Consultant Psychiatrist, Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust, UK
5. International Fellow, Essex Partnership University NHS Trust, UK
6. Lecturer, Birat Medical College and Teaching Hospital, Biratnagar, Nepal

Abstract

This educational article highlights the opportunities available for Nepalese psychiatrists in the United Kingdom. Many psychiatrists from Nepal have relocated to the United Kingdom through different routes. A discussion was held among the authors to explore these routes

and opportunities. The Royal College of Psychiatrists' exam and sponsorship programs, including the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Medical Training Initiative (MTI) and International Fellowship Programme are reviewed in detail.

*Corresponding Author

Yugesh Rai

Specialty Doctor, Essex Partnership University NHS Trust, Essex, UK
Email: raiyogesh39@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The migration of health professionals to developed countries is not a new phenomenon in Low-and-middle-income countries (LAMIC). The Nepal Medical Council (NMC) has nearly 35,000 registered doctors, including 10,588 specialists.¹ However, the precise number of professionals working in Nepal is still not known. Good Standing Certificate (GSC) is mandatory for doctors intending to work abroad. The request for GSC has almost doubled over the last two years from 2020 to 2022.

Most Nepalese doctors have decided to relocate to the UK since 2020, followed by the United States as the second most popular destination.² Career opportunities in Australia, UAE, Canada, and Maldives are also on trend. The factors contributing to the exodus of doctors from Nepal were the lack of employment opportunities, low pay, unfavourable working conditions, a lack of professional development and specialized training, political instability, and threats to job security.³⁻⁴ The pull factors were better employment prospects, higher pay, and the host nation's immigration policies.

Registration with the General Medical Council (GMC) is mandatory to practice medicine in the UK. All doctors who want to practice in the UK, including International Medical Graduates (IMGs) who have obtained their primary medical qualification outside the United Kingdom (UK) must have a

license to practice.⁵ Several psychiatrists from Nepal are now relocating to the UK through different routes. This article aims to provide information to Nepalese psychiatrists about these career opportunities in the UK. There are three main pathways for Nepalese psychiatrists to obtain GMC registration.

a. The first is registration through the Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board (PLAB), which is less popular among specialists and mainly pursued by junior doctors. The discussion about this examination is beyond the scope of this article.

b. The second pathway is applying for GMC registration after completing the Membership of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (MRCPsych), discussed in depth in a separate section of this article.

c. The third pathway to GMC registration is sponsorship. Sponsors for the GMC registration are the Academic of Royal Colleges (AoMRC) via the Medical Training Initiative Scheme and the GMC-authorized trusts that recruit qualified doctors as International Fellows.

There is no difference in the GMC registration obtained by these different pathways. The doctors only get General Registration with a license to practice, and they must participate in annual appraisal through their designated body (usually the employer) as a part of the 5-yearly revalidation with the GMC. However, if they wish to enter the specialist register of the GMC, they need to either pursue the Higher Specialty Training or the Portfolio pathway (formerly known as Certificate of Eligibility for Specialist Registration-CESR).

Medical Training Initiative (MTI) Psychiatry Scheme

The medical training initiative (MTI) scheme is a training opportunity offered by the Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCPsych) for qualified international psychiatrists.⁶ Psychiatrists who work and belong to low- and middle-income countries can receive training through this scheme for a maximum of two years. The program also supports GMC sponsorship and temporary Work Government Authorised Exchange Visa. The applications for the MTI scheme open once a year in the autumn and are advertised on the Royal College website. The minimum requirement for getting into the program is passing the English language test and the standard interview. This program started in 2014. Over the last decade, it has witnessed a rising number of global applicants from different countries, with an increment of annual allocation of training posts and interest from the National Health Services (NHS) Trusts.

The program offers experience in several sub-specialities such as general adult, old age, forensic, child and adolescent services (CAMHS) at the Core Trainee level 3 (CT3) in the NHS Trusts. Usually, vacant training posts not filled by the local UK trainees are offered to the MTI doctors. The clinical rotations are every six months. The trusts employing MTI doctors can also be flexible in offering special interest days to help them get more experience in UK mental health services.

Educational opportunities are like the core trainees, such as participating in the local and regional teaching programs and attending paid MRCPSych courses if they wish. Trainees are encouraged and supported to appear for The Member of Royal College of Psychiatrists (MRCPSych) examinations. The trainees are also entitled to and are encouraged to utilize study leave and budget. They have regular clinical supervision at their workplace and a dedicated educational supervisor, including support from the medical education department of the trust to monitor their progress. In addition to that, the trainees are also offered mentoring support by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. As a requirement for revalidation, the trainees participate in yearly annual appraisals to review with a designated appraiser in the trust.

The MTI doctors are considered valuable members of the medical workforce by the NHS trusts, and they are entitled to the facilities as NHS staff members. Most of the trusts encourage the trainees to actively contribute to residential

on-call with additional pay on top of a basic salary equivalent to CT3. However, the post is not formally deanery approved (regional training board), and completing it doesn't ensure a long-term career in the UK. The MTI training experience is beneficial for Nepalese psychiatrists to understand the UK mental health system and services in the NHS, including psychosocial and cultural aspects of mental health that influence clinical presentation and management. Most overseas psychiatrists working and training in the UK under this scheme have found it a satisfying experience despite the differences in practice.⁷⁻⁸ The training can also be a good learning experience for psychiatrists who want to develop similar services in Nepal.

International Fellowship Scheme-Sponsorship

International Fellowship is an excellent opportunity for psychiatrists qualified and registered abroad to gain further specialist experience in the UK and advance their careers. Under this program, international psychiatrists can work in the UK without Royal College Qualifications (MRCPSych) or PLAB. Though there is no requirement or specific criteria for the duration of psychiatric experience, most trusts prefer experienced psychiatrists who can work independently with some supervision. However, they must meet essential criteria such as MBBS or equivalent qualification registrable with GMC and at least three years of structured psychiatry training. The duration of fellowship programs ranges from 2-3 years. All the applicants must meet the criteria of proficiency in English test – International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or Occupational English Test (OET).

Because this is a Trust-sponsored program, there is no fixed time when the trusts open advertisements for this program. It depends on the individual trust's needs and requirements. The number of posts advertised is also not fixed. The selection procedure involves a panel interview and an assessment of the clinical skills. This clinical skills assessment is based on the CASC exam conducted by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Some trusts call for applicants in specific subspecialties like CAMHS, old age, forensic, etc. whereas others do not specify subspecialty at the time of advertisement. They are placed in one subspecialty/team and asked to rotate between different teams or subspecialties to allow them to have an overall NHS experience.

Fellows work under supervision and must maintain a portfolio and fulfil minimum requirements for appraisal.

This will also help to build up the evidence to complete CESR. Some trusts provide CESR fellowship programs under a similar scheme for international psychiatrists. If the fellow completes the MRCPsych examination, they can become eligible to apply for higher training. During this program, fellows develop higher clinical skills under supervision in areas identified through a detailed assessment of the individual. Trusts also expect fellows to achieve competencies in leadership, clinical governance, psychotherapy, medical education, research, and cross-cultural psychiatry. There will be ample opportunities to be involved in teaching and learning opportunities along with supervising medical students, physician associates, and non-medical practitioners (NMP). Fellows can have pastoral support, which helps them to make a smooth transition to a new country.

Trusts running fellowship programs for international graduates and providing GMC sponsorship are listed below.⁹

1. Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
2. Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust
3. Cumbria Northumberland Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust
4. East London NHS Foundation Trust
5. Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust
6. Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trust
7. Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust
8. Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust
9. Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
10. Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
11. NHS Grampian
12. Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust
13. Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
14. Rotherham Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust
15. Sheffield Health and Social Care NHS Foundation Trust
16. Somerset NHS Foundation Trust
17. Southwest Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
18. Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
19. Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust
20. University of Chester and Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Trust

The Member of Royal College of Psychiatrists (MRCPsych) Examinations

The MRCPsych qualification is a post-nominal title conferred by the Royal College of Psychiatrists.¹⁰ To attain this prestigious qualification, candidates must complete two written papers (papers A and B) and the Clinical Assessment of Skills and Competence (CASC) examination.

The Paper A exam covers the scientific and theoretical basis of psychiatry, while the Paper B exam focuses on critical

review and clinical topics in psychiatry. The written exams consist of 150 questions, approximately two-thirds being multiple choice (MCQ) and one-third being extended matching item questions (EMI). Candidates can expect around 100 MCQ questions and approximately 16 EMI themes (each theme consisting of three questions).

The CASC examination is structured like an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE), with the morning circuit allowing candidates four minutes to read the instructions and seven minutes to complete the consultation task. The afternoon circuit gives candidates 90 seconds to read the instructions and seven minutes to complete the consultation task.

To be eligible to sit for the CASC, candidates must have 24 months of whole-time equivalent post-foundation/internship experience in psychiatry, which should include individual posts of at least four months duration, regardless of the number of weekly sessions. The sponsors must verify their work experience during the application process. Candidates must work for a minimum of 50% or five sessions per week. From the date of publication of the results of passing the first paper, candidates have a 1643-day (roughly four years and five months) Written Paper Validity Period. If candidates take time out from employment and/or training for parental leave, they will be entitled to a further maximum of 365 days by reference to the period of parental leave. Since 1 January 2015, candidates are allowed a maximum of six attempts within their individual Written Paper Validity Period at any one component of the MRCPsych examinations. As of 1 January 2020, to ensure equal opportunities for all candidates, whether based in the UK or overseas, no more than two attempts at the CASC are permitted in each calendar year, regardless of venue.

Achievement of the MRCPsych qualification is not only evidence of a doctor's eligibility to work in the UK, but it also adds to their professional portfolio and could put them at an advantage when seeking new job opportunities.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, there are opportunities available to Nepalese psychiatrists to pursue their professional careers in the UK. These opportunities open access to work in a developed mental health system, broaden horizons and help Nepalese psychiatrists achieve global perspectives to enhance their capacity to improve services in their settings. Nevertheless, this also creates opportunities for further collaboration between psychiatrists working in Nepal and those who continue their careers in the UK.

Ethics Statement

No prior ethical approval was required as there was no involvement of human participants

Conflicts of interest

YR and ST were previous Medical Training Initiative (MTI) Doctors. RT, SU and AT worked under the International Fellowship Program.

Authors' contributions

All authors were involved in the conception, design, drafting, revision, and final approval of the work

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency, commercial or not-for-profit sectors

References

1. Nepal Medical Council [Internet]. [cited 2024 May 6]. Available from: <https://www.nmc.org.np/>
2. [Internet]. Nepal Medical Council; [cited 2024 Apr 23]. Available from: https://nmc.org.np/files/4/2078_79_Annual_report_2022_English.pdf
3. The Great Nepali Brain Drain [Internet]. 2022 [cited 2024 Apr 23]. Available from: <https://thehrmnepal.com/cover-story/the-great-nepali-brain-drain/>
4. Sapkota TN, van Teijlingen E, Simkhada PP. Nepalese health workers' migration to the United Kingdom: A qualitative study. *Health Science Journal*. 2014;8(1):57-74.
5. Registration and licensing – GMC [Internet] [cited 2024 April 28]. Available from: <https://www.gmc-uk.org/registration-and-licensing>
6. Medical training initiative (MTI): Royal College of Psychiatrists [Internet]. [cited 2024 Apr 23]. Available from: <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/training/MTI>
7. Rai Y, Al-Uzri M. Medical training initiative (MTI) Psychiatry Scheme: Online survey of trainees' experience. *British Journal of Medical Practitioners*. 2020;13(1):a004
8. Razak R, Kumar P. RCPsych MTI Scheme; Cultural Differences in Psychiatry Training Among MTI Fellows From Low and Middle-Income Countries in the UK. *BJPsych Open*. 2023 Jul 7;9(Suppl 1):S142. doi: 10.1192/bjo.2023.387. PMID: PMC10345764.
9. Applying for registration using sponsorship - GMC [Internet]. General Medical Council; [cited 2024 Apr 23]. Available from: <https://www.gmc-uk.org/registration-and-licensing/join-the-register/before-you-apply/list-of-approved-sponsoring-bodies>
10. Exams: Royal College of Psychiatrists [Internet]. [cited 2024 Apr 23]. Available from: <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/training/exams>