

## Doctors from abroad



Certain classes of people believe that foreigners are suspect pushy people who stick together and plot to take away their women and their jobs. Likewise that foreign doctors must be the bottom of the pile or surely they would have stayed at home. Even the learned Pliny the Elder

(AD 23-79), clearly unimpressed with the skill of such as Galen and Aeraetus, wrote that the mischievous immigrants who flocked to Rome during the heyday of the empire, "seduce our wives, grow rich by feeding us poisons, learn by our sufferings, and experiment by putting us to death." But in Rome, as elsewhere, the fortunes of the foreign doctors waxed and waned according to whether they were needed or not. In

America they were welcome for a while, then there seemed to be too many of them, now there is a shortage again—this time in the depressed areas of Appalachia, so that foreign doctors can obtain permanent resident status by serving there for two years as "visa doctors."

Meanwhile, elsewhere the foreign doctors, or FMGs as they were once disparagingly called, have grown in number and status. There are now over 100 000 foreign born doctors in the United States, originating from all parts of the world. Constituting one fifth of the medical staffing, they mostly took their residencies in America and have become greatly assimilated, some growing rich, others famous. Many are politically active in the local or ethnic (Greek, Filipino, or Indian) medical societies, all affiliated with the American Medical Association and thus increasingly influential. "Foreign medical graduates are immigrants," wrote the president of the Chicago Medical Society three years ago. "It takes drive, flexibility, and perseverance to change one's homeland. The United States is constantly revitalised by

absorbing new immigrants—they are not second rate physicians—at first they are willing to accept less attractive positions because they want to get started—they are grateful for the opportunity to live in America—they know that acceptance is not automatic but has to be earned—the Chicago Medical Society is proud to count many ethnic medical groups among its affiliates."

Even the names change. FMGs have become IMGs, international medical graduates, just as foreign restaurants became ethnic restaurants. There were even bills proposed in Congress last year making it illegal to discriminate against IMGs. So all is well in this land of opportunities, and the children and grandchildren of the immigrants are growing up largely indistinguishable from the other children on the block. But will they, too, forgetting their origins, become persuaded some day that foreigners are suspect pushy people who stick together and want to take away their women and their jobs?—GEORGE DUNEA, *attending physician, Cook County Hospital, Chicago, USA*