Preface

In recent years the migration of skilled health workers has grown dramatically. At the same time there has been growing demand for evidence-based health policy; hence this book seeks to document and analyse the evidence on one of the most important global trends in contemporary health care – the international migration of health workers – and trace what this might mean for policy, practice and, above all, health outcomes. Health workers have been caught up in an age of accelerated globalisation, and health cannot be seen simply in terms of national challenges. It has become a global public good.

In its 2006 annual report the World Health Organization estimated that there was a global shortage of over 4 million health workers. This is a massive figure, even compared with roughly 60 million employed health workers, and it has increased by about half a million since then. Some 57 countries, many in sub-Saharan Africa, experience a critical shortage of health workers, although migration is not the only reason for that. Substantial differences in health status have emphasised a North–South divide, but accentuated by migration.

Human resources – people – are central to health care systems and essential for the delivery of care and services to patients. The most familiar terminology of the profession, such as ‘bedside manner’, testifies to the critical role of people in diagnosis, cure and care. Health systems are being stretched and stressed by high costs of treatment and training, increased demands upon them, demographic shifts and by the mobility of health workers.

The emphasis of this book is on the provision of human resources in the global South, here generally referred to by the slightly outmoded, presumptuous and indefinable terms ‘developed’, ‘developing’ or ‘less developed’ countries. Like all concepts, these pose problems particularly in middle-income countries like South Africa, Israel or Turkey. I have also tried to refer to people, at least as much as to ‘human resources’ and ‘human capital’, although sometimes these are unavoidable. Unless otherwise stated, currencies are in US dollars. While the book aims at a global coverage, this is necessarily impossible; even allowing for linguistic incomprehension, very little has been written on Latin America while the tiny nations of the Pacific have generated a literature out of proportion to their

size, but indicating the gravity of health care issues in small island states. Moreover, not only had I previously worked there, but in mid-2009 I again visited Fiji, Tonga and Samoa to examine certain health issues, this time clutching the final draft of the book; hence if it reflects outwards from the Pacific, this is no surprise. Similarly, although the book attempts to cover the international migration of a range of skilled health workers, including specialised workers such as pharmacists, radiologists and lab technicians, most research and most literature has focused on nurses and then doctors; hence this book inevitably follows suit. In the absence of many other global studies on related issues, a wide range of examples has been included to provide breadth of coverage, although at times this collage and mosaic of fragments may border on the indigestible, and not all data meet a gold standard. My hope is that it may still play one small part in the development of a more equitable system of health care provision that is also efficient and accountable.

I could not have accomplished this alone. Pascal Zurn and Barbara Stilwell introduced me to many of the ideas (and directions to much of the grey literature) that are here. Lorraine Kerse guided me through the practicalities of migration and health in the Pacific islands. David Evans, Stuart Rosewarne, Joel Negin, Pascal Zurn, Jim Buchan, Kurt Iveson and Richard Brown read parts of the text and Alex Collie produced the maps. Thantida's table and love were great supports. I am grateful to WHO for permission to reproduce two maps and to Jim Buchan for his assistance with data for a third map. I would like to thank Felicity Plester of Edward Elgar for her continued patience and enthusiastic support for the book. The idiosyncrasies, inaccuracies and gross generalisations (that make the vague 'some' and 'many' all too frequent adjectives) are as always my own.

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