

Patients die in Britain as foreign doctors can't speak English properly

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The General Medical Council (GMC), which regulates doctors, met Health Secretary Andy Burnham to request an end to the ban on English language tests on EU nationals but was told that disobeying 'the directive' would end in huge fines from Brussels. There is no chance to renegotiate this directive until 2012. The MPs concluded: "If the GMC had been able to check the language skills and clinical competence of European doctors wishing to practice as GPs, lives might have been saved." The GMC is prevented from checking a doctor's English under the European directive, which says to do so would hamper the free movement of people. The report comes days after it was revealed that a hospital in Oxford had to send staff to English lessons because 70 different nationalities were at work there.

An inquest in February criticised the current out-of-hours arrangements following the death of 70-year-old patient David Gray in Cambridgeshire in 2008. He was killed by exhausted German doctor Daniel Ubani who during his first shift administered ten times the normal dose of diamorphine, a painkilling drug.

Category: Britain / Doctors / NHS
Level: Intermediate / Upper intermediate

Ubani had failed in his first attempt to qualify for work in Britain and exploited the different ways local primary care trusts interpreted regulations on ensuring doctors were up to the job. His poor English meant he was initially refused work by the NHS in Leeds, West Yorkshire but was later accepted in Cornwall where he was put on a performers list without language checks. No disciplinary action has been taken within the trust that employed Ubani or by the NHS against the trust. At present, EU doctors can join the British GMC register without undergoing the language and competence tests faced by other doctors from abroad, as long as their own countries' regulators vouch for their credentials. The Department of Health in England has already ordered that the NHS implement properly its existing system for safeguarding patients following revelations by British newspapers.

Kevin Barron, the health committee chairman said: "It is tragic that it takes the death of a patient to expose the serious failings now evident in the current system for checking language and competence skills of overseas doctors." Steve Field, chairman of the Royal college of GPs and co-author of the government-commissioned review said there should be a wider look at emergency care, including A&E services, out-of-hours medical provisions and GP services. Niall Dickson, Chief Executive of the GMC: "Doctors from outside the UK make a significant contribution to healthcare in this country but patient safety must always take priority over the free movement of labour."

Note: A&E=Accident and emergency; MP=Member of parliament; NHS=National Health Service; GP= General Practitioner; GMC = General Medical Council.

EXERCISES

1. Doctors: What do you know about doctors? Is their job specialised? Think of three other things you know about doctors? Go round the room swapping details.

2. Dictation: The teacher will read four to six lines of the article slowly and clearly. Students will write down what they hear. The teacher will repeat the passage slowly again. Self correct your work from page two - filling in spaces and correcting mistakes. Be honest with yourself on the number of errors. Advise the teacher of your total number of errors. Less than five is very good. Ten is acceptable. Any more is room for improvement! More than twenty - we need to do some work!

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3. Reading: Get students to read the passage aloud. Swap readers every paragraph.

4. Vocabulary: Students look through the article. Underline/highlight any vocabulary you do not know. Look in dictionaries. Discuss and help each other out. The teacher will go through & explain any words or phrases you do not understand.

5. The article: Students look through the article with the teacher.

- a) What is the article about?
- b) What do you think about it?

6. Let's do 'The Article Quiz': Have the students quiz each other in pairs. They score a point for each correct answer and half a point each time they have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

Student A

- 1) What does GMC stand for?
- 2) What does GP stand for?
- 3) What will happen in 2012?
- 4) What does NHS stand for?
- 5) What does MP stand for?
- 6) How many nationalities at an Oxford hospital had English lessons?

Student B

- 1) Name the German doctor.
- 2) What does A&E stand for?
- 3) Sum up what Steve Field said.
- 4) What did the German doctor do incorrectly? Why?
- 5) Where had the German doctor previously applied for work?
- 6) What did Niall Dickson say?

7. In a hospital: Discuss with your partner about the following places in a hospital. What might you see happen here? Add a positive & negative point for each.

1	In a ward	4	In a reception area
2	In an operating theatre	5	In an ambulance
3	In a canteen	6	In A&E

The teacher will choose some pairs to tell their stories in front of the class.

8. A day in hospital: In pairs. Look at the list below. Each person chooses to be one of the following. Think of five things that person might do or see during a typical day in hospital. Create a short story about it. Tell it to your partner. Try to make it interesting. Mention the problems, the experiences, the courage and the heartbreak. Your colleagues can then ask you some questions about 'your day'!

1	Doctor	3	Nurse
2	Patient	4	Ambulance driver

The teacher will choose some pairs to tell their stories in front of the class.

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9. Let's chat! Phone call: In pairs: One of you is in hospital. You are in a ward. Your friend is ringing you to see how you are after your operation. Your friend asks you some questions about it and hospital conditions! *5-minutes*

10. Let's think! Doctors: Swap partners. With your new partner on the board write as many words to do with **Doctors** as you can. *One-two minutes*. Compare with other teams. Using your words compile a short dialogue together.

11. Sentence starters: Finish these sentence starters. Correct your mistakes. Compare what other people have written.

- a) Patients _____
- b) EU doctors _____
- c) Foreign doctors _____
- d) The NHS _____

12. Presentation: In pairs, groups or individually: Prepare in class or at home a two minute presentation on: **My local hospital**. Stand at the front of the class to give your presentation to the class. The class can vote on the best presentation. Class – After the presentations go through the strong and weak points on each presentation. Learn from the results.

13. Let's write! An e-mail: Write and send a 200 word e-mail to your teacher about an operation you had in hospital recently (Imagine!) Your e-mail can be read out in class.

SPELLING TEST

The teacher will ask the class individually to spell the following words that are in the article. Afterwards, check your answers with your teacher, using the following ratings: **Pass = 12, Good = 15, Very good = 18, Excellent = 20**

1	patients	11	responsibility
2	lucrative	12	flouted
3	committee	13	shifts
4	directive	14	disobeying
5	disciplinary	15	renegotiate
6	properly	16	competence
7	nationalities	17	hamper
8	rigidly	18	extreme
9	commissioned	19	emergency
10	priority	20	significant

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DISCUSSION

Student A questions

- 1) Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- 2) Would you like to be a doctor or nurse? Why? Why not?
- 3) Are any of your friend's doctors or nurses?
- 4) Do you think it is difficult to be a doctor or nurse? Why? Why not?
- 5) Do you think doctors and nurses work long hours? Explain.
- 6) What is your local hospital like? Explain.
- 7) Have you ever been treated in another hospital in another town?
- 8) How do hospitals differ in your country to those in another?
- 9) Which country has the best hospitals? Why?
- 10) Which country has the poorest health system? Why?

Student B questions

- 1) What do you think about what you read?
- 2) Is medical care expensive in your country?
- 3) What percentage of your salary is spent on medical care?
- 4) What do you think of doctors who work in Britain who can't speak English properly?
- 5) Should the British government force the EU to change the rules about foreign EU doctors who can't speak English properly if this saves a life?
- 6) What do you think of 'the EU directive' that allows EU doctors to work in England yet can't speak or understand English properly?
- 7) Should lives come before EU rules?
- 8) What do you think about the case in the article?
- 9) What should the NHS do about foreign doctors who can't speak, write or understand English properly?
- 10) Did you like this discussion?

SPEAKING

Let's brainstorm! Nurses and doctors and the local hospital:

Allow 10-15 minutes - Small groups / pairs / 1 to 1

In small groups brainstorm some ideas about the following. Choose a spokesperson who can present your ideas to the class at the end of your preparation. Present it visually or use the board etc... Try to be imaginative!

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) On the board draw a body. Label it with ten parts of the body2) Think of five adult diseases and five childhood diseases3) Think of ten things nurses do in hospital4) Name five different wards you will find in a hospital5) Think of ten different medicines you can buy at a chemists
What do you use them for?6) Think of ten different things doctors do in a hospital |
|--|

The teacher can moderate the session.

GAP FILL: LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

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Patients _____ because British MPs failed to ensure foreign doctors working out-of-hours shifts can speak English properly. The matter _____ recently in the British press. Alarm bells were sounded by some senior British MPs who stressed: "The next government must 'as a matter _____' demand changes to a 2005 EU directive governing the free movement of labour in an effort to prevent more deaths at the hands of incompetent foreign GPs."

The report criticised NHS bodies _____ other vetting powers. MPs said it was wrong that Britain was sticking rigidly to EU rules, which outlaw checks on overseas GPs' language skills – while France _____. The Commons Health select committee also poured scorn on the Government for agreeing to GPs' demands for a lucrative contract which makes it too easy for them to opt out of responsibility for out-of-hours care. This has forced the NHS _____ from abroad.

The General Medical Council (GMC), _____, met Health Secretary Andy Burnham to request an end to the ban on English language tests on EU nationals but was told that disobeying 'the directive' _____ fines from Brussels. There is no chance to renegotiate this directive until 2012. The MPs concluded: "If the GMC _____ the language skills and clinical competence of European doctors wishing to practice as GPs, lives might have been saved."

The GMC is prevented from _____ English under the European directive, _____ would hamper the free movement of people. The report comes days after it was revealed that a hospital in Oxford had to send staff to English lessons because 70 different nationalities _____.

GRAMMAR

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Patients die in Britain as foreign doctors can't speak English properly

Patients have died in Britain because British MPs failed to ensure foreign doctors working out-of-hours shifts can speak English properly. The matter hit the headlines recently in the British press. Alarm bells were sounded by (1)___ some senior British MPs (2)___ stressed: "The next government must 'as a matter of extreme urgency' demand changes to a 2005 EU directive governing the free movement of labour in an effort to prevent (3)___ deaths at the hands of incompetent foreign GPs."

The report criticised NHS bodies for failing to use (4)___ vetting powers. MPs said it was wrong that Britain was sticking rigidly to EU rules, which outlaw checks on overseas GPs' language skills – (5)___ France openly flouted (6)___ . The Commons Health select committee also poured scorn on the Government (7)___ agreeing to GPs' demands for a lucrative contract (8)___ makes it too easy for them to opt out of responsibility for out-of-hours care. This has forced the NHS to bring in doctors from abroad.

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The GMC is prevented from checking a doctor's English under the European directive, which says to do so would hamper the free movement of people. The report comes days after (6)___ was revealed that (7)___ hospital in Oxford had to send staff to English lessons because 70 different nationalities were (8)___ work there.

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PUT THE ARTICLE BACK TOGETHER

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