

Reflections

Dilemma of a Doctor's Life! Should I Stay in Pakistan or Go Abroad?

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Introduction

This is a common dilemma many of us face after we finish medical college. Certainly, everyone has different circumstances and priorities in life to decide the future. The major factors are family, finances, ambitions, opportunities, and IELTS. Many who decide to go abroad do so for finances, hurdles, and difficulties of the local training and job opportunities, foreign passport, or a "better" lifestyle. Many chose to stay back due to parents, desire to pay back the country, problems of being away from their homeland, financial hurdles, visa issues, English tests, etc. No single decision is right or wrong, and one size doesn't fit all. Every decision has short-term and long-term pros & cons.

When I finished medical school & internship, I chose to do USMLE & passed it with high scores, but due to 09/11, my visa was refused. Then I joined training in Pakistan, but it was not an economically viable option for family life. I left for the UK, finished MRCP, and returned to Pakistan. Job and private practice were good, but there were many things I was not comfortable doing. Also, there was much social unrest due to law & order. Then I decided to move to UAE as it was close to Pakistan, and the opportunity was good in the short term. It was hard to adjust there due to a static career. Then I moved to Australia in 2009, finished the fellowship at Australian Royal College, got citizenship, and have a good job & practice. Life always takes a turn. Parents grew old and started getting sick. So have to travel back and forth quite frequently. Also, kids started growing up, which made me think, "should I bring them up in a non-Muslim country without them having much exposure to our values?" Discussing with wife and kids, we all agreed to move back, which took a lot of effort. So my writing is based on my experience, discussions with colleagues living abroad, and observing many others settled overseas. Certainly, there will be many versions of such stories, and not everyone agrees with my opinion.

Going abroad has benefits of early economic stability, worldwide exposure & experience, foreign qualification, a comfortable & affordable lifestyle, and independence



from the need to have contacts in power corridors. It may also be a foreign passport in some countries. Those colleagues who stayed back took a bit longer to achieve economic stability than those who belonged to rich families. Also, economic stability takes a lot of effort, and they face many hardships. They often face many hurdles to getting trained while making ends meet.

In a foreign land, the problems we face are different and sometimes unexpected. Being a foreigner, some may face discrimination and racism and have difficulties pursuing a career. These could be subtle or quite obvious. Depending on the country of residence, one may feel treated as a second or third-degree citizen. Being away from the homeland, many of us often have old parents or relatives who need care and attention. The problem gets multiplied when old parents get sick, and we can't

be of much use.

Further desperation is added when we try to liaise with our colleagues back home to get some help for sick parents, and many of us get a cold shoulder. Families look toward us due to a lack of communication from the treating doctors, and we feel helpless. Certainly, this is not the case with everyone. Being brought up in foreign countries, our kids often lack adequate exposure to religious, social, and cultural values. Society teaches them values much different and sometimes contradictory to our values. They also are confused; where do they belong to? Many parents try to teach them more than one language, which is an extra burden. Kids don't often develop strong bonding with their relatives back home due to a lack of enough stay with them.

Most importantly, the risk of kids going away from Islam is a major concern in the first or the subsequent generations. Settling abroad also needs to buy a house, which often needs bank loans, and many opt for mortga-

ges and pay interest. This is not an easy decision.

Due to the reasons mentioned above, many of us try to move back to Pakistan. This decision takes a lot of courage, effort & sacrifice. Economic and professional stability, kids' adjustment, and financial hurdles are the main problems when one decides to return to their homeland. Certainly, there are two sides to a coin, and everyone has their perspective. In summary, a decision is based on circumstances and has many pros and cons. There is no single right or wrong answer. If I reflect on my journey, I am satisfied with it but had I done it differently? The answer may be yes. I may have been even more contented staying back with my parents, enjoying the matchless tastes of Pakistani food & fruits, without migrating to many places. But that is my perspective, built after I had been through all this. Had I stayed in Pakistan, I may have felt the other way round.