



BRIEF REPORT

Review for the Korean Health Professionals and International Cooperation Doctors Dispatched to Peru by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA)

Bongyoung Kim

Division of Epidemic Intelligence Service, Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Cheongju, Korea.

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Abstract

South Korea dispatches Korean nationals to partner developing countries as an Official Development Assistance (ODA) project through the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). In the health sector, KOICA dispatches international cooperation doctors (ICDs), nurses, physical therapists, radiologic technologists, nutritionists, medical laboratory technologists, occupational therapists, and dental hygienists. A total of 216 ICDs were dispatched over 19 times from 1995 until 2013. There were 19 areas of specialties among the ICDs. The most common specialty was internal medicine (61/216, 28.2%), the second most common specialty was general surgery (43/216, 19.9%), followed by oriental medicine (27/216, 12.5%), pediatrics (17/216, 7.9%), orthopedics (16/216, 7.4%), family medicine (16/216, 7.4%), and odontology (14/216, 6.5%). The ICDs have worked in 21 countries. KOICA dispatched the highest number of ICDs to Asia (97/216, 44.9%), followed by Africa (50/216, 23.1%), Latin America (34/216, 15.7%), the commonwealth of independent states (31/216, 14.4%), and Oceania (4/216, 1.9%). Nobody was dispatched to the Middle East. A total of 134 KOICA health professionals were dispatched to Peru from 1996 until October 1, 2014. Of these, 19.4% (26/134) were ICDs, 44.8% (60/134) were nurses, 20.1% (27/134) were physical therapists, 6.7% (9/134) were radiologic technologists, 2.2% (3/134) were nutritionists, and 6.7% (9/134) were medical laboratory. ICDs' specialties comprised internal medicine (13/26, 50%), family medicine (8/26, 30.8%), pediatrics (2/26, 7.7%), otorhinolaryngology (1/26, 3.8%), orthopedics (1/26, 3.8%), and oriental medicine (1/26, 3.8%). Most of the dispatched health professionals worked at institutions that were supported by KOICA. For this reason, the proportion of health professionals who worked at public health centers (PHCs) was the highest (58.2%, 78/134) when classified by workplace type. Other KOICA health professionals worked at hospitals, governmental organizations (GOs), or schools.

E-mail: puresobakas@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

Currently, the international community led by developed countries provides many Official Development Assistance (ODA) works with the aim of poverty eradication in developing countries [1]. The health sector is fundamental among several ODA works. The United Nations (UN) established eight millennium development goals for reducing extreme poverty in 2000, and three of these are associated with the health sector [2].

South Korea dispatches Korean nationals to partner developing countries as an ODA project through the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) which is founded as a government agency [3]. In the health sector, KOICA dispatches several health professionals such as international cooperation doctors (ICDs), nurses, physical therapists, radiologic technologists, nutritionists, medical laboratory technologists, occupational therapists, and dental hygienists [4].

Peru, which is located on the central pacific coast of South America, has around 30 million nationals. There is a tremendous gap between the rich and the poor; the total income of the bottom 50% contributes only 13% of the gross domestic product and 65% of nationals cannot take advantage of health insurance [5]. KOICA began to dispatch volunteers to Peru in 1996. The first volunteers consisted of four professionals, including one ICD. KOICA overseas office in Peru was founded in 2000, and a memorandum of understanding about volunteers dispatched between Peruvian and Korean governments was signed on December 5, 2003 [6]. The health sector has been one of the principal ODA strategies of KOICA in relation to Peru. For this reason, five public health centers (PHCs) and one hospital constructed by the Korean government in Peru now exist.

Unfortunately, there are only a few studies about Korean health professionals and ICDs dispatched by KOICA. As a recent ICD in Peru, I will briefly introduce the ICD program and Korean health professionals who worked in Peru until October 1, 2014.

2. ICD program and statistics

The ICDs program is based on the objectives of the Korea overseas volunteer (KOV) program that helps to promote friendship, international cooperation, and interaction between partner countries and South Korea by means of dispatching national professionals and socioeconomic support [3]. ICDs are Korean medical doctors, dentists, or oriental doctors who were dispatched to developing countries for medical activities through the KOV program of KOICA. They are Korean nationals who have certification as a specialist doctor, or who are going to acquire that qualification within 3 months; their military service can be replaced with overseas volunteer work [7].

Participants complete a 2–4-week course of the KOV training program that includes local language and job training at the KOICA institute which is located in Seoul, South Korea before dispatch. When they arrive in partner countries, they complete a 4-week course of adaptation training which focuses on the local language. Then, ICDs start to work at institutions related to health such as PHCs, hospitals, or governmental organizations (GOs). The obligatory work period in the country to which they are dispatched is 2 years and 4 months of the total contract term (3 years). If they want, they can prolong their work in the local country up to 6 months or else they must return to South Korea and fulfil their contract term by working at public institutions which are related to medical research or development (e.g., general hospitals, national medical centers, health industry development institutes, information support of social welfare facilities, etc.) for the remaining time.

KOICA started to dispatch seven ICDs to Bangladesh, Kenya, Mongolia, Guatemala, Tanzania, Cameroon, and Nepal in 1995. KOICA has dispatched ICDs to several developing countries annually until 2013. A total of 216 ICDs were dispatched more than 19 times. The lowest number of ICDs (5) were dispatched in 1998 and 1999 and the highest number of ICDs (19) were dispatched in 2007, 2009, 2010, and 2012.

There were 19 areas of specialties among the ICDs dispatched. The most common specialty was internal medicine (61/216, 28.2%), general surgery was the second most common (43/216, 19.9%), followed by oriental medicine (27/216, 12.5%), pediatrics (17/216, 7.9%), orthopedics (16/216, 7.4%), family medicine (16/216, 7.4%), and odontology (14/216, 6.5%) (Table 1).

There are 21 countries where ICDs have worked. KOICA dispatched the highest proportion of ICDs to Asia (97/216, 44.9%), followed by Africa (50/216, 23.1%), Latin America (34/216, 15.7%), the commonwealth of independent states (31/216, 14.4%), and Oceania (4/216, 1.9%). Nobody was dispatched to the Middle East (Table 2).

3. Statistics of KOICA health professionals in Peru

KOICA has been dispatching ICDs, nurses, physical therapists, radiologic technologists, nutritionists, and medical laboratory technologists as health professionals to Peru. The first KOICA health professional team of Peru consisted of one ICD and two nurses, and they were dispatched in 1996. A total of 134 KOICA health professionals existed in Peru until October 1, 2014. Of these, 19.4% (26/134) were ICDs, 44.8% (60/134) were nurses, 20.1% (27/134) were physical therapists, 6.7% (9/134) were radiologic technologists, 2.2% (3/134) were nutritionists, and 6.7% (9/134) were medical laboratory (Table 3).

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