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Ever fancied working abroad?

Read on to find out how
to obtain locum work in
Australia

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Have you ever fancied going travelling? Maybe you are concerned that you will not be able to afford it, or that it will be difficult to find a good time to fit it in to your future career. Well, your career in pharmacy may come to your rescue.

There are many opportunities for pharmacists all over the world. This article focuses on the opportunities available for pharmacists qualifying in Great Britain to locum in Australia. Pharmacists from Britain can currently reap the benefits of the reciprocal registration agreements (mutual pharmacy degree recognition) in existence between the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and the Australian registering authorities.

However, the Council of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society made a policy decision at its October 2003 Council meeting to end reciprocal registration agreements with Australia and New Zealand. No timescale on implementation of this decision has yet been agreed and the Society will be holding discussions with the relevant bodies in Australia and New Zealand. But, for now at least, it is relatively easy for pharmacists in Britain to become registered in Australia — and vice versa.

Eligibility requirements

Australia is divided into six states and two territories, and each have separate legislation covering the recognition of pharmacy qualifications.

As a result, there are eight different registration authorities rather than a national authority like the Royal Pharmaceutical Society.

To work in Australia you must apply to the registration authority of the state in which you wish to work. The criteria for registering in each state varies so you should contact the relevant authority to establish their requirements. However, there are some requirements common to all authorities if you are to be eligible for reciprocal registration.

After registering in Britain (ie, after completing preregistration training), you must practise as a pharmacist in Britain for a minimum of 12 months. (Evidence of this, in the form of a reference from your employer, is often needed.)

A letter of good standing or certificate of identity must be issued for you by the Society no longer than six months before your intended departure date. (This is usually issued directly to the Australian registration authority to which you are applying.)

Other state requirements may include having a current first aid certificate and a certified copy of your pharmacy degree certificate.

Registering in Australia

No person can work as a pharmacist in Australia until they have registered with the relevant state authority. The reciprocal arrangements between Britain and Australia mean that pharmacists who qualify and undertake the 12 months' employment in Britain are entitled to registration after completing one month of supervised practice in Australia.

A statutory declaration from the supervising pharmacist will satisfy completion of this requirement, although different states may have different additional requirements for the registration itself. For example, before you can register in Victoria you must also be interviewed by the registrar of the Pharmacy Board of Victoria who must be satisfied that you are familiar with the legislation and guidelines affecting the practice of pharmacy in Victoria.

Registration fees also vary between states. Such fees may sometimes be reimbursed by your employer, but in some states, the registration fee is additional to an initial application fee. Once registered in one state it is easier to register in another state through a reciprocal agreement.

Visa requirements

To be able to work in Australia you will also need a visa. A working holiday visa can be applied for up to the age of 30 and entitles you to work while you travel in Australia for up to one year. Pharmacists who enter Australia on a working holiday visa are expected to work for the employer who provides the four-week preregistration training for a minimum of three months in total (ie, two months after completing their preregistration period). Three months is in fact the maximum length of time that someone can work in one position on a working holiday visa.

Alternatively, gaining sponsorship from an Australian employer allows you to stay in the same job for a longer period, ie, one year, as the employer will require a longer-term commitment from you. To find more information on visa requirements, visit www.australia.org.uk.

The role of locum agencies

Still fancy working in Australia but not sure where to start? This is where pharmacy locum agencies operating overseas transfer schemes can help. They can take much of the stress and anxiety out of making the arrangements and fulfilling the requirements to work overseas, all with no charge to the pharmacist applying.

Good agencies will require you to complete an application form and provide a comprehensive curriculum vitae to give them a clear picture of your skills and experience. This will enable them to match you with an employer in Australia.

British pharmacy locum agencies with a partner in Australia can be particularly useful. While the British agency will arrange your first placement, including four weeks of supervised preregistration training, its Australian counterparts will arrange your subsequent work

placements. This still allows you the freedom to travel as well as work and when you have completed your working holiday and are ready to return home, locum work can be arranged for you back in Britain from this end.

A personal perspective

There are opportunities for pharmacists in both the retail and hospital sectors due to a shortage of pharmacists. Andrew Clark who has travelled to Australia from Britain on a working holiday visa kindly shared his views of his experience so far.

Andrew is working as a hospital pharmacist and finding the hospital working environment friendly and relaxing. He has worked in Melbourne and Sydney. The pharmacist's role in Australia is more dispensary-oriented than in British hospitals, mainly because there are hardly any technicians in Australian hospitals, but Andrew is still learning many different ways of doing things compared with the British way.

Andrew has found that being able to work as a pharmacist has allowed him to stay in Australia and travel for longer than if he had to work in a bar, restaurant or call centre like most travellers do. Pharmacy also has much more sociable hours, allowing plenty of time to explore the new surroundings.

If you need any further help or information please feel free to e-mail me at vicepres@bpsa.com.

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