

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **A Third of Medical Students in Croatia Consider Leaving Country if They Don't Get Desired Specialisation**

ZAGREB – Final year medical students in Croatia aspire for demanding specialties such as internal medicine, pediatrics and surgery, and they are not allways willing to give up their preferences: a third of them is thinking about leaving the country if they don't get oportunity to continue education and work in their desired field of medicine, shows a new research published in the February issue of Croatian Medical Journal.

A total of 312 out of 408 (76%) final year students of all Croatian Medical Schools (Zagreb, Rijeka, Osijek, and Split) graduating in 2004 answered a questionnaire designed for this study, including questions on desired specialty, emigration preferences and scientific involment during studies.

Upon entering medical school, 99 (32%) of students already had a desired specialty, but during the course of medical education, more than half of them changed their opinion. The authors of the research notice that this is not a new phenomenon, and could hypothetically be considered as a positive trend: students' pre-medical wishes and visions are usually based on skewed image of their idealistic beliefs, rather than realistic information on professional challenges and opportunities.

At graduation, most of the students had at least one specialty choice. It is interesting how the types of preferred specialisation defer among students from one medical school to another. Internal medicine was the most desired specialty in Zagreb, pediatrics and gynecology in Rijeka, pediatrics in Osijek and surgery in Split. Almost 10 percent of students from Zagreb expressed a desire to continue their career in pharmaceutical industry. According to the authors of the study, that could be a sign of students' dissatisfaction with the health system in Croatia. The most common reason for the choice of particular specialty was "ambition", followed by the "quality of life".

Specialty preferences according to gender were somewhat predictable: male students preferred surgery and orthopedic surgery, whereas female students preferred obstetrics and gynecology. Perhaps surprisingly, the research showed much higher overall proportion of female students in medical schools in Croatia than in other countries. This disproportion is most prominent in Zagreb University Medical School, where there were more than twice as many female as male students.

When asked about their opinion on chances of getting the desired specialty in Croatia, about half of the students from Zagreb (53%) and Rijeka (54%) answered that they hope to get it. Even more students from Osijek (71%) were hopeful in this regard, while students from Split showed the least optimism (21%). A total of 137 students (44%) did not expect to get the desired specialty in Croatia. When further asked if they would consider emigration, 104 (76%) of them stated that they would consider it if they failed in pursuing the desired specialty in Croatia. The target group of countries was European Union, with Slovenia at the top of the list. The most frequent reasons for emigration involved "better earnings" and "getting a job". Other reasons involved "better organization of the health system", "better opportunities for career advancement", and "more respect for medical profession in the society".

Authors of the study point out that migration of medical professionals from eastern into western EU countries has become a major concern, and that this problem could also emerge in Croatia.

The study was conducted by Ivana Kolčić and Ozren Polašek from the Andrija Štampar School of Public Health, Zagreb; medical students Hrvoje Mihalj (Osijek), Elena Gombač

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