

Medical students in Britain can apply for grant

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The grants will be given only to Singaporeans with good grades studying at an approved medical school. There may also be training for them at a hospital here. -- ST FILE PHOTO

MEDICAL students in Britain can apply for a grant of up to \$40,000 a year to defray the cost of their final two years of education from Aug 16.

Applications for those studying in Australia or New Zealand will start at the end of January. Students elsewhere can write to the Ministry of Health (MOH) to find out when they may apply.

The grants will be given only to Singaporeans with good grades studying at an approved medical school. They come with a three-year bond for students who take a one-year grant, and four years for the full two-year grant.

The amount is capped at 60 per cent of remaining tuition fees.

Students who qualify and take up the grant may also be given postgraduate specialist training at a hospital here.

A statement from the ministry yesterday described the grant as 'an additional talent recruitment measure of the (health) clusters to attract more doctors from overseas to supplement the local pipeline of doctors'.

Many more doctors will be needed with the opening of the Khoo Teck Puat Hospital in Yishun this year and the planned opening of Jurong General Hospital in 2014.

In the past few years, more than half of the doctors entering the workforce have been foreigners or foreign-trained Singaporeans.

The MOH said the number of grants awarded will depend on 'the quality of the applicant pool, our hospitals' manpower needs and the availability of funds'. It could vary from year to year.

The idea of a grant with a bond attached was mooted by Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan earlier this year. The amount is \$10,000 lower than the figure he proposed in April.

In reply to queries from The Straits Times, Mr Khaw said that figure was just a suggestion he had made in his blog. The actual sum was decided by the health clusters, which will employ the returning graduates.

At that time, some overseas medical students raised concerns about the bond period, comparing it with the five years that local graduates serve in exchange for a subsidy for the duration of their medical studies.

Mr Khaw said: 'Currently, there is no bond and also no grant...For those who plan to return to Singapore, I see in the scheme only upsides for the students.'

For some, he said, it would make a 'meaningful difference'.

The information posted on the ministry's Facebook page elicited a suggestion from Melbourne-based Selvam Pannir to offer a similar scheme to allied health-care professionals.

Details of the scheme are available at: www.physician.mohh.com.sg/peg_salma@sph.com.sg