

# **GETTING BACK IN PRACTICE: A state grant aims to help medical professionals from other countries progress down the long road toward resuming careers in the U.S.**

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## **Body**

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Nov. 12--Obstetrician Natalya Lyadova led a team of five doctors and 10 nurses at a clinic in her native Ukraine.

Now, as an immigrant struggling to learn English in St. Paul, she is setting off on a **long road toward resuming her medical career.**

Like thousands of **medical professionals** from other **countries**, Lyadova has discovered that before she can treat people here, she must complete a rigorous, expensive and time-consuming process.

A \$450,000 **state grant** to three Minnesota agencies **aims** to give these much-needed doctors and nurses a hand. The goals are to **get** them into the field more quickly and in some cases put them to work in immigrant communities that need their language and cultural skills.

The agencies **help** immigrants pay for classes, tests and travel to testing sites. They also give guidance to the doctors, nurses and other health workers trying to make their way through the maze of required steps.

"When I came here, I understood it would be a **long** way to be a physician in this **country**," said Lyadova, 33, who lives with her husband and two young children. "But I have knowledge, I have experience and I have my wish to be a doctor. I am homesick for my profession."

Carol DaBruzzi of the International Institute of Minnesota said she has worked for several years -- with little funding until now -- trying to **help** people like Lyadova.

"I had a woman surgeon from Moscow who was working in the surgical theater (here), but as a person who would sterilize the instruments," DaBruzzi said. "The way it's set up now, it is kind of like we're using a weapon against them. We're making it harder."

DaBruzzi said she and the immigrants she works with agree the **state** must verify credentials and require tests and training. But DaBruzzi said the licensing process should not be impossible to complete.

One current barrier is that doctors must find a licensed physician here who is willing to let the new arrivals "shadow" them before they will be allowed to do a residency. But there is no formal application process to **get** immigrants into a mentoring situation, DaBruzzi said.

"It's all a word-of-mouth kind of thing," and most immigrants don't have the necessary connections, she said.

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The grant is helping agencies tackle the issue by linking established physicians with new arrivals.

For some, there is little the agencies can do. Medical workers from war-torn countries, or places where there is no functioning government, like Somalia, may be out of luck if they do not have copies of their transcripts and degrees. For those immigrants, the only option might be to go through college and medical school again.

But others can benefit. DaBruzzi is working with Peter Chweyah, 45, a physician from Kenya who arrived in Minnesota in 2004.

Chweyah has just taken the fourth test -- a two-day ordeal -- required to practice here, part of the U.S. Medical Licensing Examination. The grant money paid the \$785 test fee.

From his modest apartment in Crystal, Chweyah studied daily for the test, after helping get his four children off to school and before his 2 to 10 p.m. shift as a medical assembly line worker at Medtronic. He earns \$12 an hour at the job.

Now he must be accepted into a residency program.

"Things are not very easy," he said. "I've been very positive. You feel like you belong to a particular career. You're just trying to get back."

State Rep. Karen Clark, of Minneapolis, sponsored the funding bill, which is a one-year pilot program. She said it made sense to both political parties, especially because Minnesota has a shortage of nurses and dentists, among other professionals.

"It was clear that it was an issue that affected people all over the state and that it might be a good investment," Clark said.

Lyadova, the obstetrician, left Ukraine as a Jewish refugee and arrived in Minnesota in January.

She is taking classes in English for medical professionals at the Global Language Institute of the College of St. Scholastica. The classes are paid for by the grant.

Though Lyadova struggles with English and knows it will take years for her to get licensed again, she said it will be worth it.

"If I sit at home and cry, 'What a hard life I have,' what do I get?" she said. "I must work. Work, work, work, work."

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### Getting licensed

These agencies help foreign-trained medical professionals.

International Institute, Carol DaBruzzi, 651-647-0191, ext. 313

African and American Friendship Association, Anne Lutomia, 651-645-5828

Workforce Development Inc. (Rochester), Deb Long, 507-292-5155

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