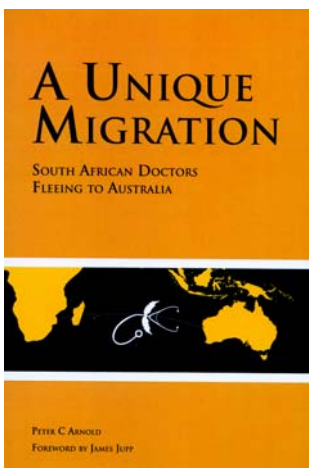
From South Africa with love

A unique migration: South African doctors fleeing to Australia. Peter C Arnold. USA: CreateSpace, 2010 (252 pp, $35.00). ISBN 9781452830780.



AS SIGNALLED by its title, Peter Arnold's treatise is an analysis of South African doctors who migrated to Australia during the latter half of the 20th century. Arnold himself was part of this exodus, soon after graduating in medicine from the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg in 1961.

He subsequently crafted an illustrious career in Australian medicine, moving between his roles as general practitioner in Sydney's eastern suburbs, President of the General Practitioners' Society in Australia, Chairman of the Federal Council of the Australian Medical Association and Deputy President of the New South Wales Medical Board.

In fact, Arnold is but one of more than 2000 South African medical graduates who have adopted Australia as their home, and South Africa now joins the United Kingdom, India and New Zealand as a major contributor to Australia's medical workforce.

The book follows a logical order, with chapters on "Why did they leave?", "Why did they choose Australia?", "The Australian experience" and "Bringing the kids, but leaving Granny behind". It also includes a review of the various theories on what made this migration distinctive.

Above all, *A unique migration* is an accessible thesis, in which the wealth of data never overwhelms the narrative. At the same time, it is underpinned by admirable scholarship and an almost encyclopaedic attention to detail, neatly reduced to a series of informative diagrams.

It reveals Australia's debt to this unique migration, which now accounts for one in 30 of the country's doctors, including luminaries such as Priscilla Kincaid-Smith, Sidney Sax and Michael Denborough.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the book is whether this great trek was the result of "push factors" such as the social upheaval following the end of apartheid, or "pull incentives" such as Australia's comparable geographic features.

A unique migration is an intriguing journey into a previously undocumented aspect of Australian immigration, and a rewarding book for interested readers. It is compulsory reading for those dealing with the medical workforce.

Conflict of interest statement: I know Peter Arnold from when I was editor of the *MJA* and he was a director of AMPCo, the publisher of the Journal.

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