

More Cuban doctors due in Brazil to work in poor areas

November 3 2013

Some 3,000 more Cuban doctors are to arrive in Brazil from Monday to join a government program to fill vacancies in the country's public health system.

Authorities said Saturday the Cubans are due in four major cities: Sao Paulo, Brasilia, Fortaleza and Belo Horizonte.

They are expected to be operational next month after undergoing a familiarization course, the official Agencia Brasil quoted the [health ministry](#) as saying.

The Cubans will join 3,664 professionals currently enrolled in the "More Doctors" program—819 Brazilians and 2,845 foreigners—to serve the underserved population of 1,098 towns and 19 indigenous districts mainly in the country's north and northeast.

The new arrivals will bring to more than 6,600 the number of doctors in the program by year's end. The government said it plans to meet demand for 12,996 physicians until next March.

The program gives priority to Brazilian doctors for the three-year posts, but relies on foreigners where necessary.

Each foreign doctor is being offered a monthly salary of \$4,240 dollars during the three-year contract. In Cuba, they earn under \$30 a month; Havana keeps most of the difference. Medical service "exports" are a

leading hard-currency earner for Communist Cuba.

Brasilia has agreed to bring in 4,000 Cuban doctors and to send their wages to the Havana government through the Pan American Health Organization.

According to Brazil's health ministry, this country of more than 200 million people has a shortage of 54,000 doctors, particularly in poor urban and rural areas.

After massive nationwide street protests in June to demand better [public health](#) services, the government launched the "More Doctors" program.

In August, a first batch of contracted Cuban doctors were booed and insulted by their mostly white Brazilian colleagues in a racially-tinged incident when they arrived in the northeastern state of Ceara.

The Cubans, many of them blacks, were slammed as "slaves" and "incompetent."

The incident touched off a furor on social media and led President Dilma Rousseff and Health Minister to slam the xenophobic reaction.

"It is important to say that foreign doctors, not just Cubans, are coming here to work in areas where Brazilian doctors do not want to work," Rousseff said at the time.

Brazilian doctors' associations have criticized the plan to lure foreigners, insisting the problem was not a shortage of [doctors](#) but rather poor management and a lack of resources in the public health sector.

Some also have voiced politically tinged concerns about Brazil cooperating with a non-democratic [government](#), in their view, giving

Cubans job opportunities instead of arranging for Brazilians to care for their own.

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