

Mercy contributes to ‘drain’ of physicians

As a Catholic and reader of The Catholic Review, I am writing in connection with the article “Mercy VP travels to Africa,” (CR, Jan. 4).

While the article points to the fact that the recruitment of nurses from Kenya is a “win-win” arrangement for Mercy Hospital and the individual nurses who may be recruited, the article fails to point out the devastating effect that the brain drain of doctors and nurses from Kenya and other developing countries is having on the health care systems of those countries.

In a recent article in Foreign Affairs magazine (January/February 2007), Laurie Garrett of the Council on Foreign Relations writes, “over the last 10 years, the country (Kenya) has lost 1, 670 physicians and 3,900 nurses to emigration.”

This situation is repeated throughout Africa and the developing world. Scarce local resources are being used to train medical personnel, many of whom end up working in the West. This exacerbates the critical shortages of local healthcare personnel in these countries, leaving gaps that even the increasingly generous supply of overseas aid is unable to fill.

While the issues are complex and the brain drain is not easy to address given the differences in living and working conditions between poor and rich countries, we find it regrettable that an article in our diocesan newspaper should applaud uncritically the way in which the government in general (through the HIC program) and Mercy Hospital in particular (through its active recruitment of Kenyan nurses) have chosen to contribute to the problem.