

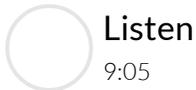
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# If rewritten, travel ban could mean doctor shortages in rural Michigan

By [STATESIDE STAFF \(/PEOPLE/STATESIDE-STAFF\)](/PEOPLE/STATESIDE-STAFF) • FEB 17, 2017

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*Stateside's conversation with physicians John Burkhardt and Mahshid Abir*

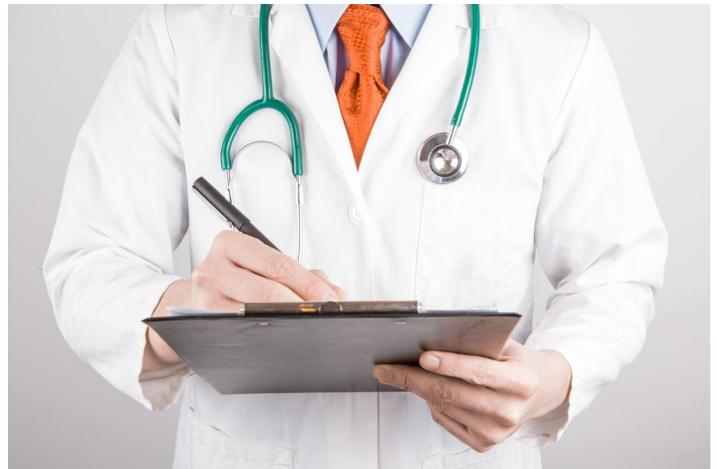
President Trump's immigration ban of seven countries with predominantly Muslim populations is causing consequences to healthcare.

An article for *The Conversation* (<https://theconversation.com/how-a-travel-ban-could-worsen-doctor-shortages-in-us-hospitals-and-threaten-primary-care-72451>) outlines what's at stake.

While the immigration ban is temporarily suspended by the courts, the authors of the article write that the travel ban has already had significant consequences.

"This is actually a pretty key time in the graduate medical education timeline," said **John Burkhardt**, a lecturer and physician with the Department of Emergency Medicine at the University of Michigan.

He said students are getting ready to match into residency, where physicians train in hospitals, while program directors are deciding which students they'll ask to join their programs.



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*Without immigrant doctors, some parts of Michigan could be in trouble.*

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"I think the overall uncertainty about what the culture for international medical students is going to be in the future makes it both uncomfortable for the applicants as well as the programs trying to make a decision on who to invite," he said.

In a letter to the Department of Homeland Security, the American Medical Association said the ban could affect people who are already underserved by health care professionals by limiting doctors from other countries.

**Mahshid Abir** is an assistant professor and physician with the Department of Emergency Medicine and director of the Acute Care Research Unit at the University of Michigan. She said immigrant physicians serve in rural and underserved areas around the country.

"Urban centers or safety net hospitals in both urban and rural areas are staffed by physicians from other nations who train in the U.S.," she said. "So by implementing such a ban, we will kind of restrict workforce. And the hospitals will have to struggle to staff appropriately."

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**"There's a lot of good evidence that diversity has important patient-care outcomes regarding who gets care and the quality of that care. And by closing off a voice from outside the country, we hurt ourselves and we hurt our patients..."**

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Abir is also one of the doctors affected by the temporarily suspended ban.

"This is actually very personal for me, being an Iranian Jewish physician immigrant," she said. "I came here in 1991 at the age of 18 and I have had the privilege to serve multiple communities across the U.S. – served many patients, saved lives. And I feel like, aside from the numbers and the absolute percentages of physicians that [the ban] may affect or may not affect down the line, the fact that we need a diverse workforce to serve a nation of immigrants I think is really important."

Burkhardt agreed.

"There's a lot of good evidence that diversity has important patient-care outcomes regarding who gets care and the quality of that care," he said. "And by closing off a voice from outside the country, we hurt ourselves and we hurt our patients – which is really what, as physicians, we're most dedicated to trying to prevent."

For the full conversation, including why our country has such a long-term doctor shortage and how the health care industry could respond should the ban clear the courts, listen above.

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