Better conditions for medical specialists would help

quell brain drain, says the dean of the First Faculty of Medicine

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“Better pay and promising careers leading to brain drain in health sector” or similar headlines have long been a staple in the Czech media and statistics indeed point to some 10 percent of graduates from medical faculties heading abroad upon completing their studies. In 2018, the Czech Medical Chamber registered the departure of 193 recent graduates.

The country’s Health Minister Adam Vojtěch is hoping to quell the departure of new doctors by introducing measures requiring future specialists to work three or four years in the Czech Republic before heading abroad.

Medical students post-graduation continue with professional training in residency – which provides new doctors in-depth training and hands-on experience in specific branches of medicine. The Minister of Health is weighing whether to double subsidies for residential posts but there is a condition – that participants would have to sign a contract that would bind them for several years. How do you view the proposal?
“Whether we are talking about specialization for doctors or for top pilots, it is clear that residency or specialization greatly improves their position on the labour market. If the state invests in specialists’ training, I think that beneficiaries should also carry certain responsibility.”

If the minister’s proposal is enacted would it effectively block the departure of Czech-trained medical specialists abroad?
“First off, the departure of such specialists is not as frequent as is sometimes presented; but it is true that in some cases the loss of such staff can negatively impact the functioning of concrete facilities. I think that a buffer period before post-graduates could leave medical facilities where they had residency, combined with state funds improving the position of experts (from a economic, professional and social perspective) would make it less attractive for post-grads to depart abroad – I think we would see a marked decrease in interest.”
If it doesn’t go through, are there other conditions that could make it more attractive for young doctors to stay in the Czech Republic?
“If we look at the situation more broadly, we see there are countless jobs our specialists can do abroad from day one, whether they are pilots, sports people, professional sports servicemen and women, scientists, or skilled artisans. The economic strength of individual sectors (as well as states as a whole) play an important role in [such decisions].

“But it doesn’t only affect us: Germany sees the departure of specialists, for example, to Switzerland. There are also many other individual factors that all play a role when it comes to deciding to work abroad: familial reasons, the prestige of facilities where they have a chance to work, the promise of personal growth and more. The best solution would be for our own health sector to achieve a similar position such as Germany or Switzerland’s…”