

Access to high-quality services depends crucially on the size, skill mix, geographic distribution and productivity of the health workforce. Health workers, and in particular doctors and nurses, are the cornerstone of health systems.

The number of doctors per capita varies widely across Asia/Pacific countries and economies. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has the highest number of doctors per capita, with 3.3 doctors per 1 000 population in 2003, the latest year available. This is a number higher than the average among OECD countries (3.1 in 2010) (Figure 3.1.1). In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the government has supported the training of health workers over the years, giving priority to training even in difficult conditions. In the mid-2000s, there were about 100 training institutions for health personnel, including central and provincial medical universities, as well as nursing and midwifery schools (WHO, 2007b).

Australia and New Zealand also have a high number of doctors compared with other Asia/Pacific countries and economies. Despite its relatively low health spending per capita, Mongolia also has a high number of physicians per capita (2.9 in 2011), much higher than the average among Asian countries and economies. Since 2000, the overall number of doctors has greatly increased in specialist and private hospitals in Mongolia, and there is evidence of over-supply of doctors, in particular of medical specialists. Despite this large supply in Mongolia, there is a shortage of experienced doctors in rural areas (Asian Development Bank, 2008).

In contrast, Papua New Guinea, Nepal, the Solomon Islands, Lao PDR and Cambodia have the lowest number of physicians per capita, associated with a low level of health expenditure (see Figure 4.1.1 in the next chapter).

In China, the number of doctors has risen by about 2% annually over the past few years (OECD, 2010b), and the number of doctors now exceeds the average across Asian countries and economies, although it remains less than half the average in OECD countries.

Nurses outnumber physicians in most Asia/Pacific countries and economies, but with a few exceptions. The number of qualified nurses is the highest in high-income countries such as Japan, Australia and New Zealand, with all of these countries having ten nurses per 1 000 population. The supply is much lower in a number of low-income countries, including Nepal, Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea and Myanmar, where there are about 0.5 nurses per 1 000 population or less. The number of nurses per capita is also relatively low in India with less than one nurse per 1 000 population, less than half the average across Asian countries and economies (Figure 3.1.2).

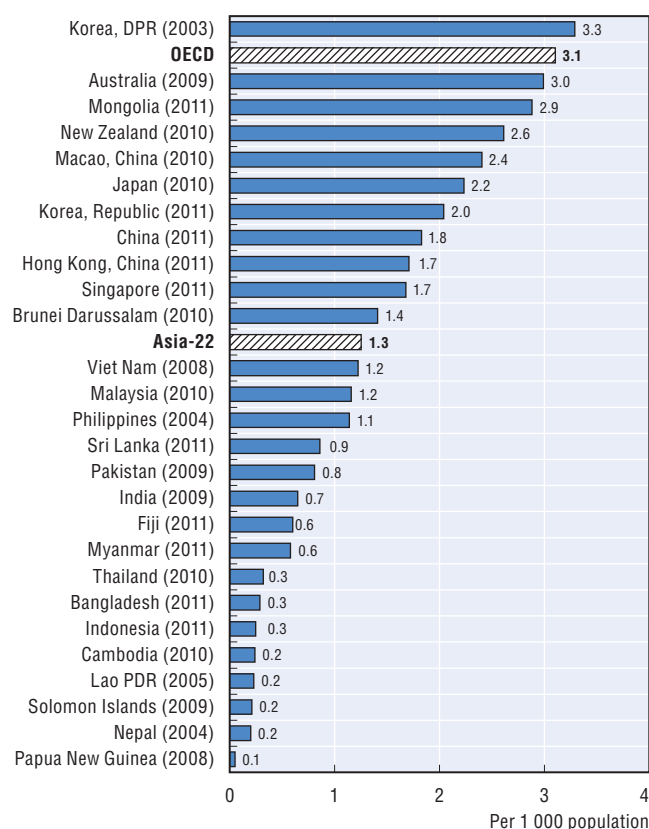
In many Asia/Pacific countries and economies, there are between two and five nurses per doctor, which is also the case in most OECD countries (Figure 3.1.3). While there are more than eight nurses per doctor in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, this simply reflects the fact that there are very few doctors in these two countries. On the other hand, there is less than one nurse per doctor in Pakistan and Bangladesh. The fact that there are more doctors than nurses in these countries raises questions about the allocation of tasks in health care delivery.

#### Definition and comparability

Doctors include physicians qualified in either allopathic medicine or other forms of medicine such as Chinese traditional medicine, ayurveda or homeopathy.

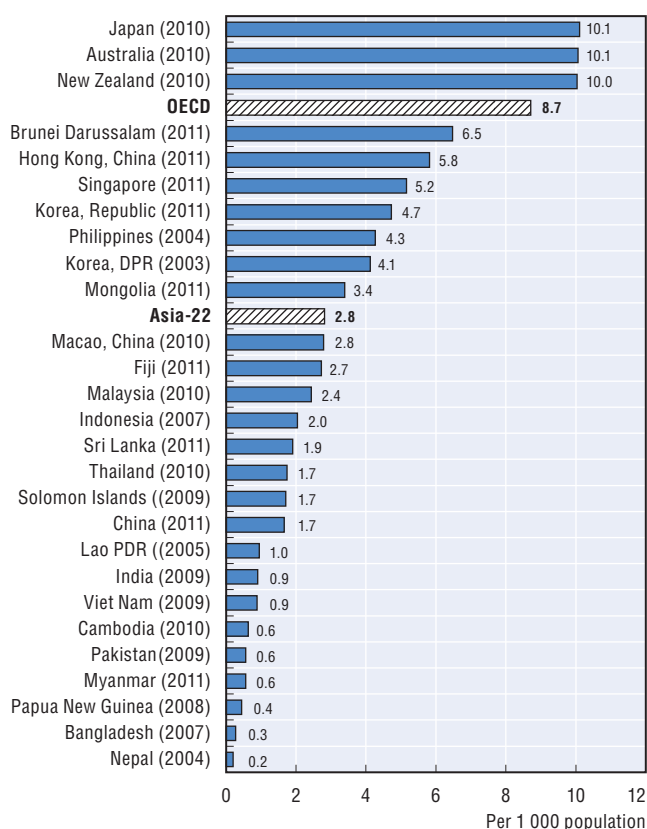
Nurses are defined as persons who have completed a programme of basic nursing education and are qualified to provide nursing care. Although midwives should normally be excluded from nurses, some Asia/Pacific countries report midwives together with nurses.

## 3.1.1. Doctors per 1 000 population, latest year available



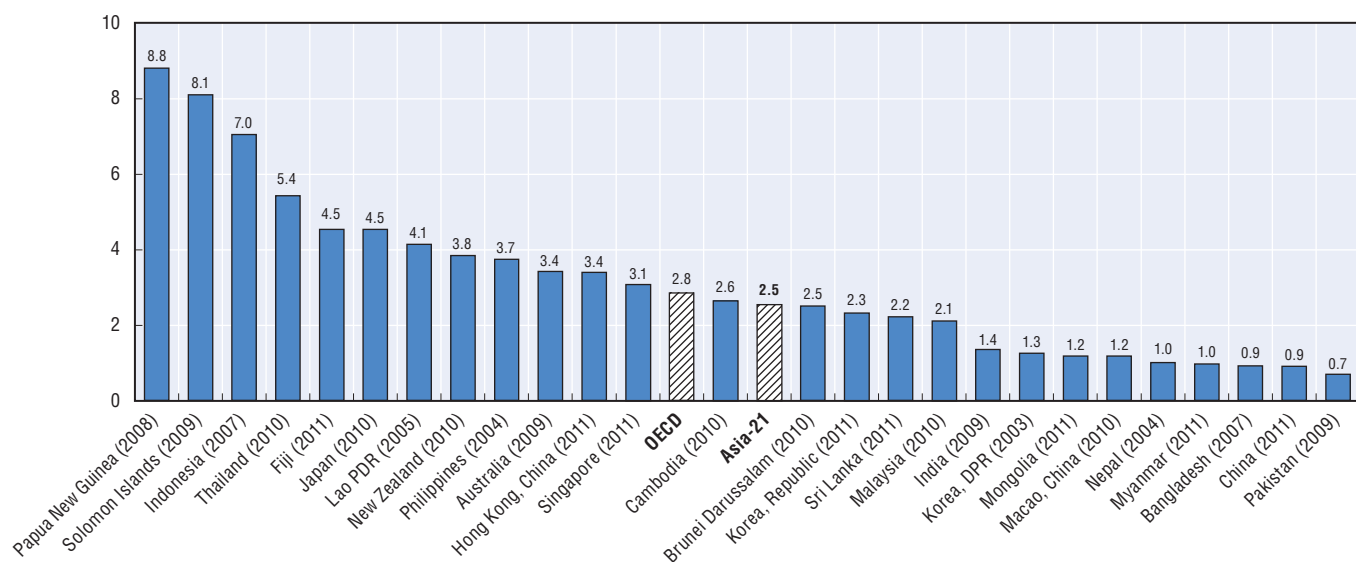
Source: OECD Health Data 2012; WHO Global Health Observatory Data Repository, national data sources.

## 3.1.2. Nurses per 1 000 population, latest year available




Source: OECD Health Data 2012; WHO Global Health Observatory Data Repository, national data sources.

## 3.1.3. Ratio of nurses to doctors, latest year available



Source: OECD Health Data 2012; WHO Global Health Observatory Data Repository, national data sources.

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932723228>



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