VARIABLES OF JOB SATISFACTION IN MEDICAL ASSISTANT PROFESSION

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VARIABLES OF JOB SATISFACTION IN MEDICAL ASSISTANT PROFESSION (Abstract). Aim: To identify the key favorable issues, showing a high degree of job satisfaction, and also the adverse issues that may affect the work performance among medical assistants.

Material and methods: This research is a type of inquiry-based opinion survey carried out by administering a self-managed, anonymous questionnaire, consisting of five sections with 25 items. The study group included 175 medical assistants from all specialties, working in public hospitals in the city of Iaşi, who answered the questionnaires. A number of 167 subjects have responded, the return rate being of 95.4%. The respondents were asked to indicate the amount of agreement or disagreement on a typical five-level Likert scale.

Results: The study has identified some positive aspects: positive perception of the medical assistant profession (76.6%); concern about personal growth and career development (86.3%); good relationships established with other colleagues (71.2%), and some negative aspects: inappropriate work conditions and equipments (70%); the income compared to the volume of work was perceived by majority as an important source of dissatisfaction (80.8%); willingness to work abroad (53.9%). Conclusions: The findings of the present research focused on the variables of job satisfaction in the medical assistant profession and should be a real concern for managers, because the job dissatisfaction may affect the employee’s productivity. Keywords: JOB SATISFACTION, MEDICAL ASSISTANT, QUESTIONNAIRE.

Job satisfaction is a major concern for managers because it is generally accepted that a satisfied employee would have more professional achievements (1, 2). It has been demonstrated a direct link between lack of performance and job dissatisfaction (3). The state of satisfaction/ dissatisfaction is a consequence of the degree of motivation to undertake a certain activity; one feels satisfied when one has reached the proposed target and dissatisfied when that did not happen.

Zamfir(4) estimates that job satisfaction encompasses the following dimensions: economic satisfaction, based on salary and obtained material benefits; satisfaction related to the work itself (working conditions, equipments and the actual work content); psycho-social satisfaction, provided by: the relationship with colleagues and the
head of the department, the opportunities for career development, the recognition of work’s results and the adopted organizational policy.

A medical assistant is an important member of the health care delivery team by performing clinical and administrative tasks, and supporting the work of physicians and other health professionals. He also represents the link between the medical doctor and the patient, being of a vital importance to the success of the medical practice.

This research is a type of inquiry-based opinion survey carried out by administering a self-managed, anonymous questionnaire, consisting of five sections with 25 items. The aim was to identify the key favorable issues, showing a high degree of job satisfaction, and also the opposite issues that may affect the work performance among medical assistants. The employees have been explained the importance of the study and that the purpose is to improve their activity and not to introduce punitive measures.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

In the design of the questionnaire there were taken into account the following criteria for the assessing the employee satisfaction: the career decision, the work itself, seen as a set of activities; the concern of the employee for the career development; the working conditions and environment; the relationship with the colleagues, the head of the department and other high levels of authority in the hierarchy of the health organization; the recognition of the work’s results and performance; the remuneration system and the income.

The questionnaire pre-testing was performed on a total of 50 subjects. The study group included 175 medical assistants working in public hospitals in the city of Iași, who answered the questionnaires. A number of 167 subjects responded, the return rate being of 95.4%.

The respondents were asked to indicate the amount of agreement or disagreement (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) on a typical five-level Likert scale (1= strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree; 6= don’t know). After the questionnaire was completed, each item has been analyzed separately. Responses were processed by counting the grades of the same type. The database and statistics were performed in *Epi Info™ 7*.

**RESULTS**

The sample included medical assistants from all specialties, with the following structure: medical specialties 81 (48.5%), surgery 70 (41.9%), radiology and clinical laboratory 16 (9.6%). The average age was 38.2 ± 7.3 years, with limits ranging between 24 and 59 years (tab. I).

Gender distribution shows a high percentage of female, 157 female nurses (94%), compared to 10 male (6%). The report male/female was approximately 1/16. The choice of a medical profession was perceived by about three quarters of respondents (76.6%) as a source of high or very high satisfaction. Around two thirds of medical assistants taken in the study declared that they were satisfied (31.7%) and very satisfied (33.5%) of their current job. The proportion of the totally dissatisfied and very little contented was 14.4%. In this respect, the activity effectively performed by the studied subjects is considered to be: dynamic and stimulating in 130 cases (77.8%); routine in 28 cases (16.7%). Nine medical assistants did not give a conclusive answer ("do not know", 5.4%).
The degree of concern for self-improvement and career development was declared as being very high by 55.7% of respondents, respectively high (30.6%). The working conditions and environment represented another variable for the employee satisfaction. The general atmosphere in the department/ hospital was assessed positively by half (49.1%) of subjects and the concrete working conditions, equipments were considered to be satisfactory by only 28.1% (tab. II).

Two types of relationships at the workplace may influence the degree of job satisfaction: those with other colleagues and with various levels of authority from the health organization. In the studied sample, a proportion of 71.2% declared themselves satisfied about the relationship with other colleagues, indicating scores of 4 (agree - 33.5%) and 5 (strongly agree - 37.7%) for this item.

The recorded answers for the item "Did your colleagues, when appropriate, recognize and appreciate your effort/ merits?", were positive in half of cases (56.3%). A proportion of 7.2% answered "don't know". Other scores were awarded as follows: 1 - strongly disagree, 9 subjects (4.8%); 2 - disagree, 18 subjects (10.8%); 3 - neither agree, nor disagree, 35 subjects (20.9%).

The interpersonal relationships at the workplace have been also analyzed in terms of their involvement and support provided in difficult situations. Approximately two thirds (64.7%) of the medical assistants consider that their colleagues would strongly help them in critical moments. In the same time, the relationship with the boss/ supervisor was considered to be satisfactory in 64.1% of cases, this contributing to an increased efficiency of the performed activity (tab. III).

The activity of the hospital management
team was favorably assessed by half of the surveyed medical assistants (54.5%), the share of strong or quite dissatisfied representing about one quarter of total (23.9%).

**TABLE III**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of the relationship of subordination</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In what measure:</td>
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<td>------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your boss recognized and appreciated your effort/ merits?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your boss supported you in professional and personal problems?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nr.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In your care unit is it encouraged the freely expression of your own points of view?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nr.</td>
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</tbody>
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Another variable for the job satisfaction was the income. A proportion of 11.4% of subjects were satisfied with the income in connection to the performed work, and only 5.4% declared themselves very satisfied. The totally dissatisfaction due to an inappropriate income was found in a percentage of 29.9%, meaning that the medical assistants gave the minimum score. The perception “quite dissatisfied” was recorded in almost half of cases (50.9%).

The willingness to work abroad was manifested in a proportion of 53.9%. Approximately one third (37.7%) do not want it, the rest of answers being included in the category "do not know".

**DISCUSSION**

Nurses are working in all structures and levels of the health system, being by far the largest group of healthcare workers. Due to its specificity (providing health care), the health sector absorbs predominantly female workforce, especially in case of the medical assistants (5). This fact is outlined by the report male/female, of approximately 1/16, found in this research. The distribution by age showed a higher weight in the age group 30-39 years, when the professional performance is high.

A challenging work that gives positive satisfaction, arising from intrinsic conditions of the job itself, represented a key motivator for performance and a reason of job satisfaction in more than three quarters of the sample. In the same time, the findings emphasized the psychological need to achieve and grow, fulfilled by training activities (courses, workshops, peer experience exchange). Thus, a permanent concern for self-improvement and career development was recorded in 86.3% of subjects.

People who get along with coworkers will develop positive interpersonal relationships at workplace, which will fuel the work achievement and the success in the career (1). The findings of the study revealed that the relationships with the colleagues were assessed as a source of: satisfaction (71.2%); recognition of the person-
Abraham Maslow developed a general theory of human motivation, on the premise that human motivations are based on different needs (6). These were grouped into five categories, ordered under the form of a pyramid, those of the basic level being most pressing (fig. 1). From the perspective of Maslow pyramid, the basic needs could be met by a minimum wage and working conditions that do not endanger health (7).

Positive issues are: the choice of the medical assistant profession and of the subsequent job represent a source of satisfaction; work itself was assessed as being dynamic and stimulating; subjects were highly concerned about self-improvement, personal growth, achievement and career development; good relationships established with other colleagues. Negative issues could be: inappropriate work conditions, equipment; willingness to work abroad recorded in more than half of cases; the income compared to the volume of work was perceived by majority as an important source of dissatisfaction.

The existence of good working conditions may not always increase the degree of motivation, but certainly, bad conditions will lead to its reduction (8). In the studied sample the perception of the work itself was significant more favorable compared to the working environment and working conditions.

The research focused, also, on the relation between salary and the work satisfaction, as a premise for the quality of health care provided by the medical staff. In any country, the income was and continues to be considered a strong predictor for job satisfaction (9).

A warning signal is represented by the medical assistants who answered the questionnaire and declared that they were totally or quite dissatisfied in terms of income (80.8%). In the same time, the lack of satisfaction in various degrees was also, found in relation with the work conditions (71.9%).

The manager of a health organization

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**Fig. 1. Maslow pyramid of needs**

- **General examples**
  - Satisfaction
  - Professional status
  - Friendship
  - Stability
  - Food

- **Self actualization**
- **Social acknowledge**
- **Belonging**
- **Safety**
- **Physiological needs**

- **Organisational examples**
  - Professional satisfaction
  - Titles
  - Functions
  - Colleagues
  - Retirement system
  - Income
must ensure that each employee is enough motivated to be productive, in other words, to provide quality health services. The employees have various needs and different motivations to be met, and the concern for the income is no less honorable than any other motivation from Maslow's pyramid (based on need of safety, need of belonging, companionship or friendship, and need for esteem and social recognition), thus we may conclude that actually all motivations matter in the employee's productivity.

As a consequence, half of the surveyed staff (53.9%) would work in other countries. Thus, the already recorded human capital injection from Central and Eastern Europe to other regions, may lead to a worsening shortage of health human resources (10).

CONCLUSIONS

The study identified some positive aspects, which showed a high degree of job satisfaction, and some negative aspects (both recorded in at least half of cases).

Positive issues are related to good experiences, and these are due to 'motivators' - the work itself, achievement, recognition, challenging work, responsibility. Motivators that give positive satisfaction, arise from the intrinsic conditions of the job itself.

Dissatisfaction is rather due to bad experiences and results from the lack of specific factors (good working conditions, appropriate salary and benefits). These are extrinsic to the work itself, and include aspects such as company policies, supervisory practices, or wages/salary.

In order to perform an effective management it is necessary to find a balance between the work satisfaction of the employee and the fulfillment of the organizational proposed goals (providing health care and services).

The findings of the present research focused on the variables of job satisfaction in the medical assistant profession and should be a real concern for managers, because the job dissatisfaction may affect the employee's productivity.

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