Medical Staff Motivation - Essential Condition for Obtaining a High Level of Performance in Hospitals in Romania

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Abstract
Development of the health sector, superior performance achievement for units providing medical services and health services improvement have been the main objectives of health reform in the last two decades. In addition to economic and financial issues, the human resources policies have been studied in an attempt to solve some of the deficiencies in this system. All changes resulting from healthcare reforms and legislative changes had some negative influences on the volume and working conditions in the hospital sector. Thus Romania has become the leading exporter of medical personnel in the European market. In this context, rural areas are the most affected ones and many hospitals remained without coverage in certain specialties. Therefore we believe that in order to improve the quality of health services it is essential to identify the motivational elements that can overcome the obstacles imposed by the system.

Key words: healthcare system, human resources management, medical staff, labor migration, motivational factors

JEL Classification: I12, I15

Introduction
As public services with particular relevance to population, the health services were one of the most debated topics both on national and international level. For Romania, the last twenty years have been characterized by a series of reforms and legislative changes that have influenced the conduct of business in healthcare. Transition from highly centralized health system to a system based on mandatory health insurance has been the most important change so far. The reform has brought many benefits for all the health system actors (increased concerns for efficiency and effectiveness), but has also brought a series of disadvantages, such as increased imbalances, that negatively influenced the population’s health. The amount of deficiencies the Romanian health system is currently facing has had an impact on the health care quality.

In addition to the eternal problem of underfunding, recent years have brought changes on volume and working conditions, elements that have contributed significantly to increased migration. Schedule load of administrative work, underdeveloped infrastructure, the depreciation of medical profession, the lack of financial and psycho-social motivational factors are just some elements that made Romania the main labor force exporter in the European Area. Personnel deficit in the health sector became increasingly pronounced, especially since Romania’s accession to the European Union enabled the liberalization of labor. The possibility to work in countries with developed health care systems, correlated
with a remuneration lower the European Union average, resulted in the massive migration of health professionals.

This way, Romania lost a significant number of highly qualified medical staff and physicians, aged between 30-50, which means personnel with extensive experience. The problem of human resources in the health system has been approached also by the Presidential Commission for the Analysis and Development of Public Health Policy (P.C.A.D.P.H.P) in Romania. Within the report it is clearly indicated that „Romania faces a major imbalance in terms of planning, training and human resources management in health, having the lowest personal number reported to the population from the European Union, for almost all categories of medical staff”.

The report highlights that due to the deficiencies and poor quality of services, our country loses an impressive number of people annually. The decrease of this indicator can be achieved by applying some adequate human resources policies, in economic and social context. Most analysts of the health system believe that „people are the key to the system” but „there is no clearly formulated policy of human resources, that creates problems with motivation and retention of medical staff, leading ultimately to severe imbalances”.1

As far as we are facing a quite pronounced deficit of human resources in some areas it will be difficult to reach significant improvements in hospitals activity. According to some authors, „the activity focus on the work volume, on hours worked, on quantity as such, actually entails decrease of quality and associated elements”.2

The depreciation of health services quality is forbidden in a developing country, which should ensure good health for all people. The role of the health system is to maintain the health of society at a high level to ensure proper functioning of all activities. Membership status of European Union requires Romania's compliance to some standards and international recommendations related to efficiency increase of health units and improve quality services provided to patients. Through developed programs, the European Union closely controls the patients' rights and the way the healthcare services are rendered to the citizens from community area. In this context there is a change in vision of the Ministry of Public Health that, through the Strategic Plan for 2008-2010, aimed at „improving population health and achieving of a modern and efficient health care system, compatible with the European Union systems, for the citizens’ permanent care”. One of the objectives in this period was „the life quality increase by improving the quality and safety of medical care”.3 Such objectives are pursued further through programs and plans to reform the system, becoming strategic objectives for the Ministry of Health and the rest of the bodies involved in health insurance.

To achieve these objectives the way we approach the human resources management from system is essential. Hospitals - key units of the health system - should be prioritized in the process of solving the issues regarding personnel deficit.

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The importance of human resources in health care system

The performances of the health organizations depend on the way human resources are used to perform the activities necessary to achieve the established objectives. Today, the healthcare sector in Romania is in the process of development and adaptation to EU requirements. The assumption that human resource is the key to building a strong healthcare system and prepared to meet the new requirements is supported even by the current system critics of. Basically, the management and use of the other resources depend on people in the system and on their level of training.

The importance of human resources can not be challenged in an area with unique characteristics such as the medical one. In addition to the specific features, this is underlined also by the high costs involved. Therefore, human resource management began to be viewed (especially in recent years, when quality has become a core value of the system) as „a crucial element to the success of healthcare organizations and of the whole health care system”.

According to some authors, the human resources management aims at „ensuring a sufficient staff with certain skills and adequate training for an effective and efficient use of resources”.

Unfortunately, from now on, Romania has a long way to achieve this goal. Regarding the human resource management, we have seen some weaknesses that must be corrected as soon as possible to achieve improved quality of service:

- high level of responsibilities avoidance, meaning that lack a strong culture built on the principles of professional ethics. Health professionals must be able to admit their mistakes and must be able to be responsible for the injuries caused to the patient. Also, the nature of business requires the doctor to maintain a permanent relation with the patient throughout the going on treatment.
- lack of a specific monitoring program to the professionals activity, meaning that it is difficult to carefully supervise the daily tasks realisation.
- limited number of medical professionals. Number of medical staff reported to population is the lowest in the European Union. Even though in 2012 the Ministry of Health unblocked an important number of vacancies in the health system, we are still deficient in this respect.
- lack of a coherent program of maintaining the specialists in the country.
- imbalance between staffing needs and the number of graduates. Even if in the whole country, it is necessary to employ a large number of health professionals, graduates can hardly handle the desired positions.
- human resource planning is not realised on the real need for labor.
- inefficient use of available resources, which affects employee productivity and efficiency
- insufficient training of medical staff. Although we have medical staff highly trained in certain specialties however there can be noticed the need of continuous improvement programs, especially that the medicine rate of growth is extremely fast. Computer technology can be barely used by the personnel.

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absence of motivational factors. In the entire health care system we noticed the lack of a clear worded motivational policy going to lead to the planned objectives. Because of financial conditions in some medical units, doctors have to face even the impossibility to implement all the knowledge acquired.

The exercise of human resource management activities (planning, organization, management, training and human resource development, staff motivation, performance evaluation) is essential for improving the hospital performance indicators. Although all functions are of major importance in the process of management, the staff motivation function requires special attention.

Demotivation of doctors and medium staff is directly reflected in the quality of care that reaches the consumer. Therefore, the quality of health services is generally evaluated subjectively by patients, and the most important aspect is the quality of care received in hospital.

The quality of health services is determined by the suppliers’ motivation. Some authors emphasize that „the dissatisfied and overworked staff is not able to provide the customers care or support that they need”.

From the analysts’ point of view „health professionals play an important role in determining the extent and nature of training, in establishing a framework for continuous learning, in monitoring practice of clinical quality and enforcement of ethical standards”.

So, the effects caused by the lack of motivation of practitioners and support staff can be easier anticipated.

The plans to reform the health system had as fundamental objectives the following ones: increased efficiency in the provision of health services, increasing accessibility to health services, improved quality of care and performance indicators of hospitals, settlement of the services based on performance, etc. These goals may be achieved only using the methods and techniques for human resource management that bring more medical staff motivation. The researches in this area have shown that improvement of the health system performance can be achieved by promoting a „new and progressive” human resources management. In this context, encouraging teamwork can be an important motivator, especially since individual activities do no longer exist in medical area. Quality management specialists believe that „the effectiveness of a team has a huge impact on the success of any initiative to improve something”.

It is important that the performance of health units should be evaluated based on the analysis of human resources indicators (Figure 1).

Very important are the inputs of human resource that must be made in accordance with the needs of the health system and the resources available at the time of analysis. Current economic climate does not allow large inserts of personnel in the health sector. Therefore, focus on how we can motivate the current resources is the key to improving health care quality. Hospital management has at least the moral responsibility to create a favourable work environment for such sensitive activities to be carried on.

Conclusions

Human resources in health are the key process to improve the quality of health services. Performance of health service unit depends decisively on the motivation of human resources. Any form of motivation should be considered a long term investment that will bring multiple benefits to patients and health units. Health system deficiencies are obstacles difficult to overcome, but the work in hospitals can not be conducted without the full staff’s involvement. Romania is currently facing strong regional imbalances in terms of health care coverage. Without the application of coherent measures to maintain health professionals in the country, these imbalances will grow more. After five years of EU membership, the number of doctors and nurses has considerably decreased. At the same time the number of admissions was growing and, as for this indicator, Romania was the first among the member countries. Thus, the coherent fulfillment of the motivational function of the actual human resources will become a mandatory requirement for the system strengthening so that it could meet the population’s demands.

Acknowledgments

This work was co-financed from the European Social Fund through Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013, project number POSDRU/107/1.5/S/77213 „PhD for a career in interdisciplinary economic research at European standards”.

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