**Retention strategy for health professional: Opinions from the resigned medical practitioners and professional nurses at Mankweng Academic Hospital, Limpopo, South Africa**

**Abstract**

**Background:** Effective medical service and enough health professionals are required to develop quality health service. Recruitment, retention of the health workforce and increased health financing in developing countries are important to achieve the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 3 to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. Aim of this study to find out the perception and opinions from the resigned medical practitioners and professional nurses of Mankweng Academic Hospital regarding the retention of staff. **Method:** An observational retrospective descriptive quantitative design associated with all resigned medical practitioners and professional nurses who quitted from Mankweng Academic Hospital from January 2018 to December 2022. **Result**: A total 121 medical practitioners and professional nurses resigned from January 2018 to December 2022. among them 74 were medical practitioners and 47 professional nurses. Lack of prospects (26%), relocation (26%) and promotion (19%) were the important associated factors responsible for quitting the job from the group of medical practitioners. Promotion (34%), poor working conditions (13%) and work-related stress (13%) were main reasons for the resignation from the professional nurses. Over 24% medical practitioners proposed to increase the number of the staff and 49% of the professional nurses advocated increasing the number of staff. **In conclusion,** opinions of the resigned medical practitioners and professional nurses was to emphasise on increasing the number of staff. Adequate staffing is necessary in the health sector. Increasing the number of health professionals is imperative and equally, enhanced promotions should be considered addressing to retain the employee.

**Key Words:** medical practitioner, Professional nurse, Health professional, resignation, perception

**Introduction**

Effective medical service and enough health professionals are required to develop quality health service. Recruitment, retention of the health workforce and increased health financing in developing countries are important to achieve the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 3 to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages [1]. National Health Insurance (NHI) Act, 2023 is a health financing system in South Africa that aims to provide affordable healthcare to all citizens and one of the main purposes of the NHI bill to achieve universal access to quality health care services in the Republic [2]. Shortages of health professional and staff turnover have grave effect on the organisation and decrease the capacities to deliver required services in the health-care sector worldwide [3,4].

Previous literature stated that staff turnover and intentions to leave are influenced by work stress and time pressure [5,6]. Study by Harvey C & Stalker C showed that intentions to leave and individual decisions to quit are frequently linked with factors related to employee motivation and job satisfaction [7]. One important way to resolve the turnover issues is by engaging the employee and keeping current staff happy, abating the risk of staff considering other job opportunities [8]. Administrator and employee engagement is an important factor in reducing staff resignations [9,10]. Faithful governance is considered a substantial element for retaining competent employees [11].

Mankweng Hospital is a tertiary academic institution providing teaching, training and clinical services to the population of the Limpopo Province, South Africa. Lack of promotion was the dominant factor of resignation of health professionals from the previous study at Mankweng Academic Hospital [12,13]. Medical practitioners and professional nurses are the large number of health professionals working in the health sector. Aim of this study to find out the perception and opinions from the resigned medical practitioners and professional nurses of Mankweng Academic Hospital regarding the retention of health professionals. This information can be utilized to improve the retention strategies of health professionals in the public sector.

**Methods**

It is an observational retrospective descriptive quantitative study linked with medical practitioners and professional nurses who resigned from Mankweng Academic Hospital in a 5-year period from January 2018 to December 2022. Human Resource Manager usually requests all resigned or retired employees to complete the questionnaires before their departure for the purpose of future assessment. Data from exit interview information sheet for the 5-year period from 2018 to 2022 were retrieved from Human resource management. Medical practitioners and professional nurses who resigned in that period were included in the study and those medical practitioners and professional nurses who retired at normal retirement age were excluded. Collected data were documented with gender, rank, first reason for leaving, and suggestions for retention of health professionals. Microsoft Excel 2016 is used for data capturing & analysis. Categorical variables were expressed as frequency and percentage.

**Result**

A total 121 medical practitioners and Professional nurses resigned from January 2018 to December 2022. among them 74 were medical practitioners and 47 were professional nurses**.** A summary of the reason for leaving and their opinions for retention listed in Table1 and Table 2.

More insightful if graphical representation done

**Table 1: Descriptive summary of medical practitioners’ resignations**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Discription** | **frequency (%)** |
| **Gender** | Male | 37(50%) |
| Female | 37(50%) |
| Total | 74(100%) |
| **RANK**  | Medical officer  | 63(85%) |
| Medical specialist | 11(15%) |
| **Reasons of resigning** | Lack of prospect advancement | 19(25.7%) |
| Relocation to other area | 19(25.7%) |
| Promotion | 14(18.9%) |
| Family reason | 8(10.8%) |
| Work related stress | 4(5.4%) |
| Poor working condition | 4(5.4%) |
| Further study | 3(4%) |
| Set up business | 2(2.7%) |
| Dissatisfaction department policy | 1(1.4%) |
| Total | 74(100%) |
| **OPINIONS FOR retention** | Improve staffing | 18(24.3%) |
| Employee support | 16(21.6%) |
| Offer registrar post | 10(13.5%) |
| Improve working condition | 8(10.8%) |
| Salary adjustment | 3(4.5%) |
| Enhance promotion | 2(2.7%) |
| Increase theatre time | 2(2.7%) |
| Other (Offer accommodation, RWOP Offer incentive etc.) | 8(10.8%) |
| No comment | 7(9.5%) |
| Total | 74 |

**Table 2: Descriptive summary of Professional nurses’ resignation**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Discription** | **frequency (%)** |
| **Gender** | Male | 2(4.3%) |
| Female | 45(95,7%) |
| Total | 47 |
| **Reasons of resigning** | Promotion | 16(34%) |
| Poor working condition | 6(12.8%) |
| Work related stress | 6(12.8%) |
| Ill health | 5(10.7%) |
| Family reason | 5(10.7%) |
| Relocation to other area | 3(6.4%) |
| Lack of prospect advancement | 2(4.3%) |
| Further study | 1(2.1%) |
| Set up business | 1(2.1%) |
| Personal matter | 1(2.1%) |
| Temporary contract | 1(2.1%) |
| Total | 47(100%) |
| **OPINIONS MADE FOR retention** | Improve staffing  | 23(48.9%) |
| Employee support | 8(17%) |
| Salary adjustment  | 4(8.5%) |
| Enhance promotion  | 3(6.4%) |
| Improve working condition | 2(4.3%) |
| Recognition | 2(4.3%) |
| Appoint permanently | 2(2.2%) |
| Other (provide prospect advancement, be transparent, Development nursing personnel | 3(6.4%) |
|  Total | 47(100%) |

**Discussion:**

In this study, a total 121 health professionals were evaluated. among them 74 were medical practitioners and 47 were professional nurses. Lack of prospects (26%), relocation (26%) and promotion (19%) were the important associated factors responsible for quitting the job from the group of medical practitioners. Some clinical departments in Mankweng Hospital were not fully accredited for the M.Med programme due to a shortage of the medical specialists. Subsequently, few medical officers considered to leave for training posts in some other institution. It is of utmost importance for the Hospital management to engage the specialists to retain them and employ more specialist to maintain the accreditation status of relevant departments and obviously which will reduce the turnover of medical officer who want career advancement.  Although, lack of prospects, relocation and promotion were the leading cause for resigning from the group of medical practitioners, the opinions made by them to retain the health profession was entirely different from the reason for leaving. Over 24% medical practitioners proposed to increase the number of the doctors and about 22% advocated for employee support to retain the staff. When assessing the resignation of professional nurses, 34% of them left because of lack of promotions from this hospital. Nonetheless, when evaluating the suggestion for retaining the staff, 49% of the professional nurses advocated increasing the number of staff rather than promotion and about 17% advocated for employee support to retain the staff.

There are many reasons associated with resignation including personal factors, administrative factors, distance to work or job opportunities which may not be possible to achieve within the existing establishment [14,15,16]. Some staff relocate themselves into finer positions that connect more intently with their career intentions [17]. Promotion is one of the significant related factors for health professionals to resign from health institution [12,13,18]. From the survey of [Chad Saley](https://chghealthcare.com/blog/author/chad/), primary motive for making their career change of physicians a desire for better work/life balance [19].

Common factors that cause turnover: Lack of workplace engagement, burnout of stress, anxiety and depression. Few other literatures asserted the importance of fatigue and mental strain at the individual level [5,20,21,22]. Burnout is one of the key factors that are related to leaving the job. Healthcare employees are extremely prone to burnout and fatigue. In the healthcare institution, burnout is primarily caused by staffing shortages. Shortages of staff make the working conditions more stressful which leads to fatigue. In this study, about 26% of the nursing staff and 11% of medical practitioners resigned because of poor working conditions and work-related stress. Increasing the number of health professionals obviously will lessen the workload, reduce burnout, fatigue, and stress which ultimately assist to improve the working condition and decrease the turnover. Many literatures mentioned that increased health professionals are vital. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 Legal guide 2019 encouraged for increased recruitment and retention of the health workforce in developing countries to attain the targets of SDG 3 to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages [1]. Bergmann and Scarpello clearly stated that vacant posts need to be filled to improve the service delivery and reduce the burnout and fatigue. [23]. Friendly working condition is essential to keep the employees in an institution [23]. Employment of health professionals contributes to improve the performing and reduces the workload.

In few literatures indicate that support from colleagues and supervisors are valuable for lowering the intentions of employees [16,24]. Many supervisors are unaware of the relationship between their conduct and decisions they make with their subordinates. Relationships between supervisor and employee are very vital to retain the employee [25]. Staff engagement is imperative in the institution, with a view to implement a retention plan [26]. Engagement of leader and employee lowers employee turnover by accelerating the relationship between supervisor and employees [9,10]. Lemoine *et al*. 2019 reveal in their research that a leader’s morals can influence their leadership effectiveness in noticeable ways [27]. True leadership contributes to the retention of staffs by reducing employees’ emotional debilitation, which upsurges the levels of job satisfaction and work engagement, thereby increasing their levels of emotional obligation and creating a good work environment ([28,29,30,31]. Trustworthy leaders can develop reliable relations with employees and may possibly enhance employees’ perceived support from supervisors [11]. Harvey and Stalker stated that leaders use turnover levels as indicators of administrative well-being. Low turnovers signify those employees are pleased with their working conditions. [7]. Gardner *et al.* (2011) and Lemoine *et al.* (2019) indicate that faithful leadership confidently affects employee attitudes, behaviours, and performance [27,32].

In this study, lack of prospects and promotion were the leading cause for resigning, nevertheless resigned employees stressed more clearly on increasing the number of staff. Over 24% medical practitioners proposed to increase the number of the doctors and 49% of the professional nurses advocated increasing the number of staff. Resignation of skill, experienced health professionals can impact any institution. If hospitals do not tackle the turnover crisis, service delivery and training programs will be affected, as a result patient satisfaction will continue to drop over time. Aluminati advocated to provide more value to Workforces and develop retention strategies instead of losing employees [17].

**Conclusions**

Although many medical practitioners and professional nurses left because of lack of promotion and prospect development, the opinions of the resigned medical practitioners and professional nurses was to emphasise on increasing the number of staff. Adequate staffing is necessary in the health sector. Increasing the number of health professionals is imperative and equally, enhanced promotions should be considered addressing to retain the employee.

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