

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SPECIALIZATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS MOTIVATION AMONG MEDICAL STAFF

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Abstract: Opportunities for specialization, professional development and career progression are of particular importance, alongside funding, for all healthcare professionals. Often they also determine the choice of workplace.

Purpose: To investigate the perception of the opportunity for specialization and professional development, as well as the incentives for it, of the employees of the “Pirogov” University Hospital.

Methodology: A survey was conducted among 572 employees of “Pirogov” University Hospital.

Result: The most critical towards the opportunity for specialization and professional development at the “Pirogov” University Hospital are employees aged 25 to 44 years. They gave an "excellent" or "good" rating in 60.2% of cases for ages 25 to 34 and in 62.0% of cases for ages 35 to 44, respectively. The group with the highest percentage of "excellent" or "good" ratings is the oldest age group - 81.3%. Women and those with more experience rate the opportunities and incentives for professional development higher. In addition to being the only hospital for emergency medicine in Bulgaria, the "Pirogov" University Hospital has clinics unique to the country and others of national importance and functions. Therefore, it is extremely important how the staff of the hospital assesses the quality of medical activity in the hospital.

Conclusions: The assessment of the quality of medical activity of the staff of the “Pirogov” University Hospital correlates with the assessment of the opportunity for specialization and professional development, respectively the incentives for this. 91.6% of the respondents chose the same or two similar ratings in their answers to the questions about the quality of the medical service and the opportunity for specialization and professional development, and the incentives for this. Correspondingly, 25.9% rated the quality of medical care higher compared to the opportunity for specialization and professional development.

Recommendations: The quality of the activity is determined by the qualifications of the staff. In the survey we found a very high overall evaluation of the service by the medics. Workers set higher demands, have higher criteria and expectations even compared to patients. This should be taken into account by the hospital management and the principal.

Keywords: “Pirogov” University Hospital, quality of medical service, specialization, medical staff

1. INTRODUCTION

All strategic documents concerning the development of the health sector in the last three decades in Bulgaria highlight as one of their priorities the problem of adapting human resources to the new economic conditions and professional requirements (Strategizing national health in the 21st century: a handbook chapter 4: priority-setting for national health policies, strategies and plans, 2020; National Health Strategy 2014-2020, 2020).

However, the human resources problem remains a major issue in the functioning of all health systems, including in Bulgaria, regardless of the priorities outlined in the strategic documents. The planning and especially the implementation of the specifically set goals have not been very successful (Падев, Е., 2023). The specific indicators of the shortage of medical specialists and the imbalance by region, specialty and professional group prove this (Павлова, Г., 2023; Кондева, С., 2018).

Numerous studies by government, professional and civil society organizations have found that factors such as pay are important in determining where medical professionals choose to work, but particularly important conditions are opportunities for specialization, professional development and advancement, and working conditions (Проект BG05M9OP001-1.011 – 0002, 2018; Strategizing national health in the 21st century, 2020).

The legal and financial macro-framework for the specialization and payment of medics is a national policy (Наредба 1, 2015), but each medical institution also predetermines/contributes to the pace of professional development and motivation of medics in this field through internal rules, organization of the scientific and medical-diagnostic process, through the level of material and technical facilities, financial incentives for quality, scientific achievements, acquired specialties, degrees and scientific achievements. Given the scientific orientation of the “Pirogov” University Hospital, the principle of continuing education of human resources and its effective application is closely related to the knowledge, follow-up and introduction of new methods of treatment and the conduct of specialized training at the academic level. All over the world, scientific and teaching activities are considered as a factor of progress that makes professional knowledge a value in itself.

There are three main areas of professional qualification that are covered at the hospital - undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral development. All three are related to the introduction of the principle of continuous, uninterrupted learning, contain a logical sequence that the Hospital embraces and supports in terms of teaching resources, clinical material and theoretical forms of knowledge transfer. The aim and ambition of the “Pirogov” University Hospital, as a university structure, in this complex and long-term process of creating valuable human capital, is to expand its activities by strengthening cooperation with external institutions and homologous structures at international level in different program platforms

“Pirogov” University Hospital falls into the group of high-tech hospitals and highly specialized medical services.

The aim of this work is to investigate the evaluation of the opportunity for specialization and professional development, as well as the incentives for this, of the employees of the “Pirogov” University Hospital.

2. METHODS

This study is based on the results of a survey conducted in April-May 2023 among the staff of “Pirogov” Hospital. 572 people working in the hospital participated in the survey. The questionnaire contained 16 closed questions, 11 of which could only be answered by one of the indicated answers and the remaining 5 by all applicable answers. Nominal and ordinal scales of measurement were used, necessitating the application of chi-square analysis (Field, A., 2017) in examining dependencies. The value of Pearson's chi-square criterion, χ^2 , and its significance, p , are given in parentheses after each test. A significance level of $\alpha=0.05$ was used for analysis purposes. A large number of response options sometimes violates the prerequisites for the correct application of chi-square analysis: that there are no cells in the crosstab with an expected value less than 1 and, second, that if there are cells with an expected value less than 5, they are no more than 20%. In such cases, a likelihood ratio correction chi-square criterion, denoted $(\chi)^2$ (likelihood ratio statistic).

Cramer's coefficient (Cramer's V) was also applied to assess the strength of dependence of responses to a pair of questions in cases where it was statistically significant, as it is normalized in the range of 0 to 1 (Field, A., 2017). The processing of the questionnaires was done using the SPSS software package.

3. RESULTS

For the purpose of analysis, the responses "Head of Department" and "Head of Clinic" to the question about the position held were combined into one common category: "Head of Department or Clinic".

In response to the question, "How do you rate the opportunity for specialization and professional development, and the incentives for doing so?", the largest percentage of respondents, 47.6%, gave a rating of "good" (Fig. 1). Another 21.2% choose an "excellent" rating. This is followed by "satisfactory" with 18.5% and "unsatisfactory" with 10.8%. 11 people or 1.9% of respondents did not indicate an answer to this question.

No statistically significant relationship was found between responses to this question and gender ($\chi^2 (3)=7.647$; $p=0.054$), education ($\chi^2 (6)=8.347$; $p=0.214$), seniority ($\chi^2 (6)=8.286$; $p=0.218$) and position ($\chi^2 (18)=17.857$; $p=0.465$).

Among the first 5, so called passport block questions, only age ($\chi^2 (15)=25.228$; $p=0.047$; Cramer's $V=0.122$) had a statistically significant relationship with question responses. The relationship with responses to question 2: "gender" is not statistically significant in the data set collected, but is very close to the threshold for statistical significance that we have assumed, $\alpha=0.05$.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of responses to the question by age. Again, those working in the hospital aged 25 to 44 were the most critical of the opportunity for specialisation and professional development. They gave an "excellent" or "good" rating in 60.2% of cases for ages 25 to 34 and in 62.0% of cases for ages 35 to 44, respectively. The group with the highest percentage of "excellent" or "good" ratings was the oldest age group at 81.3%. The remaining age groups gave ratings of "excellent" or "good" in similar percentages of cases, 72.7% for ages 18 to 24; 73.6% for ages 45 to 54; and 73.3% for ages 55 to 64, respectively.

Fig. 1. Distribution of responses to the question by age: "How do you assess the possibility of specialization and professional development, and the incentives to do so?"

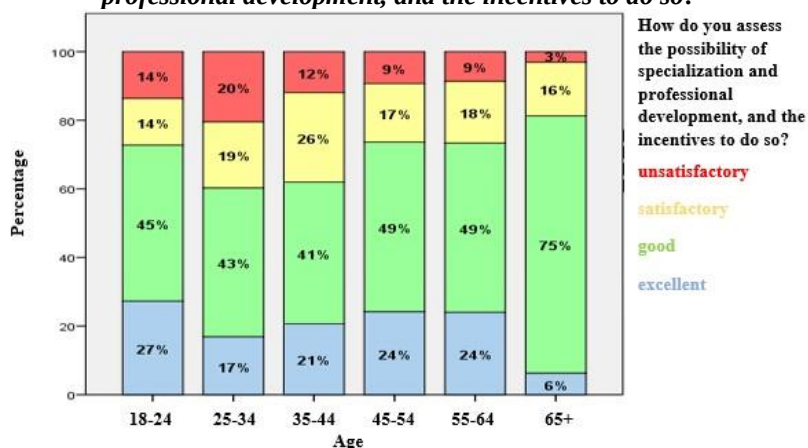
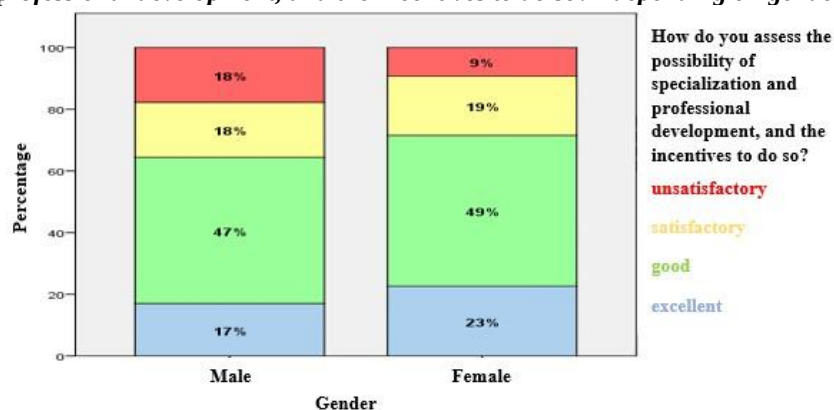


Figure 2 presents the distribution of responses to the question "How do you assess the possibility of specialization and professional development, and the incentives to do so?" depending on gender. Men to a greater extent than the general level chose an assessment of "unsatisfactory". Women chose the other three ratings in higher percentages compared to men: "excellent," "good," and "satisfactory." There was a correlation between responses to questions 6 and 10 ($\chi^2(9) = 149.927$; $p = 0.000$; Cramer's $V = 0.298$). 49.7% of respondents (284 people) gave the same answer to both questions. 43.8% of those who rated question 6 "excellent", 56.7% of those who preferred a rating of "good", respectively 39.0% and 45.2% of those who rated the quality of medical care in the hospital as "satisfactory" and "unsatisfactory" chose the same ratings for the possibility of specialization and professional development.

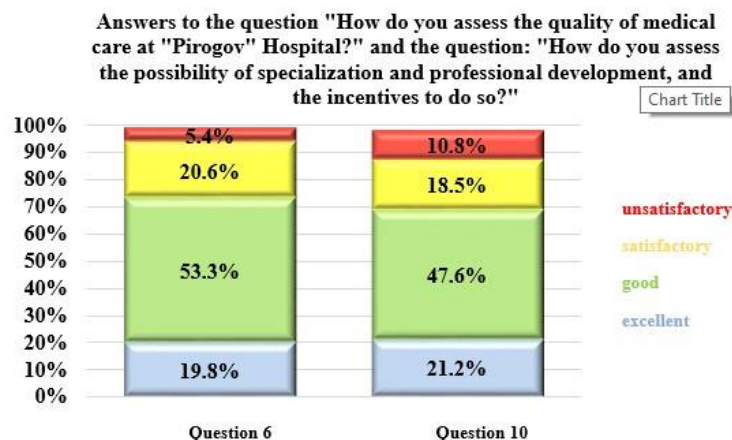
Fig. 2. Distribution of answers to the question "How do you assess the possibility of specialization and professional development, and the incentives to do so?" depending on gender



In addition to being the country's only hospital for emergency medicine, "Pirogov" University Hospital has clinics unique to the country, and others with national importance and functions. Therefore, it is extremely important how the staff of the medical facility evaluates the quality of medical activity in the hospital. The quality of the activity is predetermined by the qualification of the staff.

The answers to the question: "How do you assess the quality of medical care at "Pirogov" Hospital?" and the question "How do you assess the possibility of specialization and professional development, and the incentives to do so?" are shown in fig. 3.

Fig. 3. Answers to questions, "How do you rate the quality of medical care at "Pirogov" Hospital?" and "How do you assess the possibility of specialization and professional development, and the incentives to do so?"



The percentage of selected ratings "excellent" or "good" as an answer to the question about evaluating the quality of medical care is 73.1% and is higher than the corresponding percentage for the question "How do you evaluate the possibility of specialization and professional development, and the incentives to do so?" - 68.8%. However, applying McNemar's test [1, 2] for equality of proportions in dependent samples, there is no reason to reject the hypothesis of equality between the proportions of voter ratings "excellent" or "good" for sixth and tenth questions ($p=0.118$).

In the survey, we found a very high general evaluation of the service by the doctors. Employees set higher demands, have higher criteria and expectations even than patients.

4. CONCLUSION

Opportunities for specialization, professional development and career growth are of particular importance along with funding for all medical professionals. Often they also determine the choice of workplace. The most critical of the possibility of specialization and professional development in "Pirogov" University Hospital are the workers aged 25 to 44. They rated "excellent" or "good" respectively in 60.2% of cases for ages 25 to 34 and in 62.0% of cases for ages 35 to 44. With the largest percentage of "excellent" or "good" ratings is the group of the oldest - 81.3%. The remaining age groups gave ratings "excellent" or "good" in similar percentages of cases, respectively in 72.7% for ages 18 to 24; 73.6% for ages 45 to 54 and 73.3% for ages 55 to 64.

Men, to a greater extent than the general level, chose the rating "unsatisfactory". Women in higher percentages than men chose the other three ratings: "excellent", "good" and "satisfactory". I.e. older people and women are more likely to give a high assessment of the present conditions for professional development in the hospital.

In addition to being the country's only hospital for emergency medicine, "Pirogov" University Hospital has clinics unique to the country, and others with national importance and functions. Therefore, it is extremely important how the staff of the medical facility evaluates the quality of medical activity in the hospital. In the survey, we found a very high overall assessment of the service by both doctors and patients (this is the subject of another publication). And yet - it is higher on the part of patients than on the staff. Working people set higher demands, have higher criteria and expectations.

The correlation of the assessment of the quality of medical activity and the assessment of the possibility of specialization, professional development and the incentives for this in the answers of the staff respondents is interesting.

Categorically, the assessment of the quality of the medical activity of the staff of "Pirogov" University Hospital correlates with the assessment of the possibility of specialization and professional development, respectively the incentives to do so. 91.6% of the respondents choose the same or two adjacent ratings when answering questions about the quality of the offered medical service and the possibility of specialization and professional development, and the incentives to do so. Accordingly, 25.9% rate the quality of medical care higher than the possibility of specialization and professional development.

LITERATURE

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