

Physician Retention: Job Satisfaction Comes From Balance



Teaching hospitals' retention of physicians depends upon many factors, but the key to job satisfaction may come down to one word: balance. A new study from the University of Virginia Health System showed that doctors are more likely to stay in the field of academic medicine at their institutions if their responsibilities reflect the "right mix" of four responsibilities: administration, patient care, research and teaching.

Researchers examined data from a 2011-2012 nationwide survey called the Faculty Forward Engagement Survey, comprising feedback from more than 8,000 physicians. The survey identified four mission areas and surveyed physicians about how they allocated their time. One hypothesis was that doctors were leaving because they spent too much time seeing patients.

Lead author Susan M. Pollart, MD, explained, "It's been hypothesised that if an academic clinician spends 90 percent of his or her time seeing patients, they are more likely to leave academic medicine to do that in private practice." In fact, there was no link between time spent on patient care responsibilities and intent to leave academic medicine.

Asking the Right Questions

The key to physician job satisfaction will be different for each physician, since each will have different priorities and interests. Whenever there is a perception that too much time is being allocated to teaching or to administrative duties or to clinical responsibilities, physicians are more likely to leave. Academic hospitals will do well to ask physicians during annual reviews whether they feel a proper balance exists between their responsibilities.

"We don't know if adjusting those will reduce the number of people who leave. It's possible it will. It's possible that just asking the question will reduce the number of people who leave. ...And it at least suggests people should be asked, how do you feel about the way you are spending your time?" said Pollart.

Appreciating Part-Time Employees

The study appears online in *Academic Medicine*, an Association of American Medical Colleges journal. A separate study by Pollart and her colleagues, titled "Characteristics, Satisfaction and Engagement of Part-Time Faculty at U.S. Medical Schools" has been published in the same journal. A key finding of the second study is that more men work part time to accommodate other professional obligations, including other jobs. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to work part time due to family responsibilities.

According to Pollart, it is crucial for medical schools to recognise the potential and value of part-time employees. Maintaining strong relationships with them by presenting engaging opportunities can pay off in the future. Pollart herself worked part time while raising a family, and is now the senior associate dean for faculty affairs and faculty development at the University of Virginia School of Medicine.

Reference: Newswise

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