

An Investigation into the Factors that Influence the Retention of Health Professionals in the Public Sector and its impact on the Health of the community of Limpopo Province, Vhembe District: A case Study of Donald Fraser Hospital

BY

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ABSTRACT

Every year, health professionals leave the South African public sector in large numbers, citing reasons such as low salaries and unsatisfactory working conditions as the main contributing factors. However, despite this, there are some health professionals who continue to choose to stay for the duration of their careers, and it is the aim of this study to investigate the factors and challenges that influence these choices. The researcher has tried to achieve this by trying to predict those factors that cause health professional to stay at their current work places and by finding out if these health professionals share any common characteristics and motivations which contribute to their decisions to stay. The research participants were also asked to rate their current job satisfaction, rank the importance of given motivation factors for retention and what they knew about their own institutions' retention strategies.

The study population was made up of all fully qualified health professionals working for the South African public sector in Limpopo province, Vhembe district between January and December 2011. There were 25 health professionals who met these study criteria, 76 (82.0%) who completed the questionnaire.

The research revealed that characteristics such as gender, age, race, marital status, having children and being the family breadwinner played a significant role as determinants of whether health professionals left or stayed at their current public sector jobs in 2010. For example, the female participants and those who had children were twice as likely to stay as the male participants and those who did not have children, respectively. Similarly, the white participants and those who were family breadwinners were three times more likely to stay than those of other racial groups and non-breadwinners, respectively. Health professionals over the age of thirty-one were almost five times more likely to stay than their younger counterparts. On the other hand, factors such as professional rankings,

having postgraduate qualifications and the type or level of institution seemed to play relatively insignificant roles.

According to the results, the respondents' main source of dissatisfaction was their salaries, followed by what they felt were poor opportunities for promotion. Feeling unappreciated and undervalued in their workplaces, as well as poor recognition for their professional status, were also rated as contributors to dissatisfaction. They felt that more attention needed to be given to improve on these factors and challenges if the retention of health professionals was to be achieved successfully.

The challenges which received the highest importance rating and ranking as retention factors, included, once again, better salaries, promotion opportunities, career development and training opportunities, as well as receiving the scarce skills allowance. In terms of knowledge of the existence of retention strategies for health professionals in their institutions, only 29% responded positively, the most commonly cited one being the scarce skills allowance.

The main conclusion that was drawn from this study is that in addition to better salaries, improved working conditions and more promotion opportunities, there are more characteristic features that are shared by those health professionals that stay in the public sector of Vhembe district, Donald Fraser Hospital.

Finally, in terms of some of the key recommendations made, the findings of this study revealed a heightened necessity for the government of South Africa to review the salary structure of public sector health professionals in an effort to motivate them and encourage them to stay. Furthermore, it is recommended that health managers improve their human resource record keeping; particularly worker flow and turnover data, and those they encourage more evidence-based research in the field of health human resources.