



Working Conditions, Job Satisfaction, and Work-Life Balance Among Physicians and Nurses: An institutional Perspective on a Swiss Acute Hospital

Oral Presentation (Scientific)

Author: Carole Ammann Et al.

For some years, the development of the Swiss health care system has been subject to rapid changes - similar to that of many other countries worldwide. These transformations are driven by neoliberal processes and have heavily affected the nurses and physicians' trainings and everyday working life. At the same time, Swiss hospitals face major challenges related to a severe shortage of personnel, in particular in the area of nursing. Against that background, this paper looks at an acute hospital by using the approach of an institutional ethnography. On the one hand, we research the hospital's explicit strategies and concepts to gain and retain their health care staff. On the other hand, we investigate the norms and everyday rules which are implicitly constructed, reconstructed and bargained over by different actors within the hospital. Furthermore, we ask which factors contribute to the health professionals' job satisfaction. And finally, we study how the health personnel reconciles work, family and leisure in a 24/7 operation and what role the organisation of the hospitals play therein. For this qualitative project, we first collected data outside the hospital, namely statistics, legal documents, reports and policy papers of different stakeholders within the health sector. In addition, we conducted semi-structured, narrative interviews with experts and individual physicians and nurses to gain an overview of current discourses. In a second step, we did an institutional ethnography inside a Swiss acute hospital. There, we collected documents, made observations and conducted informal conversations as well as semi-structured, narrative interviews with nurses, physicians, the HR personnel and the management. Our preliminary results show that the working conditions of the health personnel have changed tremendously within the last two decades. On the one hand, the reorganisation of the training in the area of nursing has led to new professional profiles. This then impacted the grade and skill-mix as well as the health workers' competences within medical units. On the other hand, the above-mentioned changes have affected their fields of activity. Nurses and physicians for example complain about the numerous administrative tasks they must fulfil which reduces the available time for the individual patients. Furthermore - and not least because more and more women work nowadays -, the health workers have different expectations regarding their work-life-balance than a generation or two ago. Irregular working hours (together with overtime among physicians) make it difficult to reconcile work, family life and leisure activities. ALL these factors negatively impact the health professionals' job satisfaction and finally result in a lower professional retention time which then again aggravates the current personnel shortage within the health sector. In this paper, we illustrate from an institutional perspective how a Swiss acute hospital handles these difficulties in order to keep its staff healthy and motivated.