



# Healthcare Services Employees Perception about Staff Motivation

Angela-Eliza MICU \*, Daniel Adrian GARDAN \*\*, Iuliana Petronela GARDAN (GEANGU) \*\*\*

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## ABSTRACT

Motivation of healthcare employees represents a very complex task due to the specific context that is present in the field of healthcare services. In this field the staff motivation is built upon a mix of factors both intrinsic and extrinsic, that are having also a dynamic of their own. The present research consists of a qualitative type research using the in-depth interview method in order to investigate the perception of physicians employees toward the medical staff motivation. The results are showing that for doctors, a very important aspect is given by the fact that their activity implies doing "medical acts" and not simple provisions like in the case of other services. So, it becomes very obvious in their perception the profound human dimension of the medical activity and the importance of intrinsic motivation build upon professional and ethical standards. Another very important element is represented by the networking with work colleagues, the possibility to develop a professional dialogue, and in case of the respondents that are not having their own medical office the management style and possibility to communicate in a proper manner with superior layers of managers.

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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, the healthcare services field is confronting all over the world with multiple changes due to the need of implementing sustainable development models on one hand, and the huge dynamic of patient needs on the other hand. The postmodern consumer has a different type of consuming behavior and referring to healthcare services we may highlight some essential characteristics as: the superior level of education in the medical field, access to a greater amount of information regarding medical topics, the need to share with others opinions and thoughts regarding their health - related experiences, a higher level of exigency etc. In this context, the healthcare employees represent a valuable resource for the institutions that are willing to respond in a proper manner to all this changes. For this to happen, every medical institution has to develop a particular employee management strategy, capable to optimize work relationship and staff motivation on a long run. Also it becomes essential for any medical organization to effectively implement a successful integration of the inter-functional strategies, primary the staff management one as well, in order to deliver superior value to the final customers - the patients. (Nichifor, B., 2009, pp. 63-66) In case of medical employees, especially when we talk about employees more educated and implied in more complex tasks like doctors, work motivation and satisfaction is build using intrinsic variables mainly, using also the support offered by extrinsic variables like working conditions, possibility of professional dialogue etc.

## 2. Staff motivation within healthcare services framework

The healthcare services framework represents a very demanding field regarding the motivation of employees and the relationship between variables that can influence this. This situation occurs because of the complexity of the process of developing and maintaining work motivation amongst employees. In the field of healthcare services motivation is based on a large area of motives, both intrinsic and extrinsic that can shape the perceptions and attitudes of the employees. On the following, we can show a brief synthesis of some aspects revealed by the scientific literature regarding this topic. A research conducted in Italy over a sample of 442 nurses shows the link between job autonomy, intrinsic work motivation, affective commitment and turnover intention. (Galletta, M., Portoghese, I., & Battistelli, A., 2011, pp. 1-19) The main hypothesis that was tested refers to the fact that affective commitment can mediate the relationship between the other variables - job autonomy and intrinsic work motivation on one hand and turnover intention on the other hand. So it becomes obvious that in the healthcare services field the problem of employee motivation is mainly centered on a complex relation between intrinsic and extrinsic factors with a greater emphasis put on the intrinsic layer.

\* Ovidius University of Constanta, Romania, \*\* Institute of World Economy-Romanian Academy, Bucharest Romania, \*\*\* Institute of National Economy-Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania. E-mail addresses: [angelaelizamicu@yahoo.com](mailto:angelaelizamicu@yahoo.com) (A.E. Micu), [danielgardan@yahoo.com](mailto:danielgardan@yahoo.com) (D. A Gardan), [geanugupetronela@yahoo.com](mailto:geanugupetronela@yahoo.com) (I. P. Gardan Geangu)

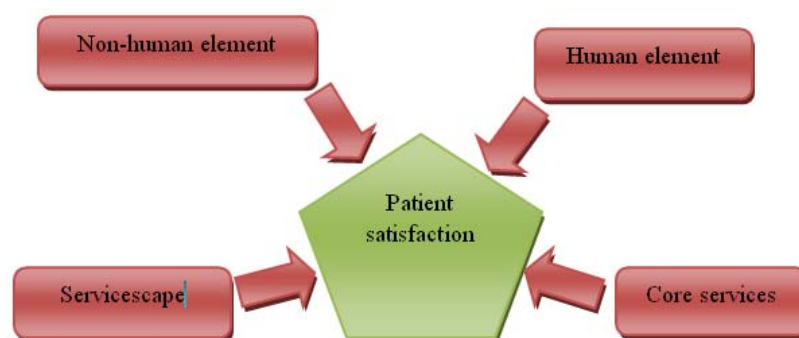
Another research aimed to identify factors that contribute to the hospital employees satisfaction, was conducted in 2005 and 2010 on 784 and respectively 1091 respondents highlighting variables like: career development, job-competence fit, working conditions and quality of relationships with management. (Baret, C., Dumas, F., Mairesse, C., & Randon, S., 2013, pp. 124-134)

Satisfaction of employees represents the fundamental basis for building motivation and commitment. Factors that contribute to the employees' satisfaction are very similar with those that can develop and build motivation. These factors cover a wide range depending on the particular setting and the needs of the employees. The needs can be different according to the status and the type of activity. The employees with a higher degree of education, and a more complex and demanding working tasks like doctors may have a different behavior and a different response to various motivational factors in comparison with other type of healthcare employees like nurses or administrative ones. For example in the context of Macedonian health system a research conducted over 212 doctors has point out the factors that are influencing employees motivation as being: salary, sense of value, job safety, mutual respect, job autonomy, opportunities for skill development, opportunity to be creative, opportunity to learn and improve, being praised for a job well done, working in a growing profession. (Veseli, N., Aziri, B., & Veseli, T., 2014, pp. 725 - 732) From another angle the most important aspects of their job, mentioned by the respondents were: salary followed by being accepted by the patients, good interpersonal relations, being respected by the co-workers and being treated equally. Another research shows that there are extrinsic and intrinsic combination of factors that can contribute to the satisfaction of the healthcare services employees. Extrinsic factors such as: working conditions, supervision, management styles and salary can impact negatively the job satisfaction. Also, the communication with managers and the organizational climate were important factors. (Pietersen, C., 2005, pp. 19-25) As we have stated above, factors that are determining the employees' motivation are very connected with those that are determining job satisfaction. When it has to be analyzed both of the layers, there are some scientific approaches that can be used, one of them being represented by the Hertzberg two-factor motivational theory. From this respect we can discuss about a research made on a sample of 133 respondents - employees from a very large private hospital in Cyprus that studied with the help of a questionnaire build on Hertzberg two-factor motivational theory, factors that can influence the job satisfaction and motivation of employees. (Oladotun, J. K., & Ozturen, A., 2015, pp. 106-123) The researchers have used a questionnaire build on 59 items comprising the motivation factor (recognition, work itself, responsibility, growth, employees connectedness to the organization. the hygiene factor is made up also by five subsets comprising: supervisor, leadership, salary, benefits relationship with the co-workers. The results of the research has shown that motivators or hygiene factors had little impact on influencing the job satisfaction level of the hospital employees, so the Hertzberg two factors were not enough to predict the job satisfaction. The same research shows that connectedness to organization have a great significance toward job satisfaction. In the same time, demographic variables are not effective contributors in job satisfaction among hospital employees. Another variable that showed a great importance from the point of view of the correlation with job satisfaction was employees' job security.

The complex picture of medical staff motivation needs also studies that can emphasize the connection that can be made not only between staff motivation and job satisfaction but also between these two variables and patient satisfaction in the same time.

In a study implemented in public hospitals in Sri Lanka, researchers have tested a conceptual model referring to the patient satisfaction correlated with motivation of the employees and work satisfaction. (Ismail, M. B. M., & Velnampy, T., 2013, pp. 135-145)

The conceptual model for patient satisfaction is shown below:



**Figure 1. The conceptual model of patient satisfaction**

*Source: Ismail Mohamed Bawa Mohideen, Velnampy Thirunavukkarasu, Determinants of patient satisfaction in public health service organizations in eastern province of Sri Lanka, The USV Annals of Economics and Public Administration, vol 13, issue 2 (18), 2013, pg 138*

The model was tested through a pilot research and the results has shown that core services (core benefit, problem solution, features), human element of the service (reliability, responsiveness, assurance, recovery, empathy, critical incidence) and non-human elements of the service (process, procedure, system, technology) can explain up to 94% of total variations for patient satisfaction. So the natural conclusion that can be drawn is that taking into consideration the very basis of the patient satisfaction in case of healthcare services, the relationship with the degree of motivation and satisfaction of the employees is direct and powerful.

### **3. Methodology**

In order to analyze the research topic, it was chosen the in depth qualitative type research. This type of research method is considered appropriate for the research purpose because perceptions usually can be investigated using qualitative techniques.

The main purpose of the research has been set as finding the perceptions that employees from medical field have regarding staff motivation and its implications at the level of consumer behavior. The main criteria used for the selection of the research sample were referring to sex, age, medical specialization, position within the employee institution, work experience. For these above criteria the final selection of the sample was made taking into account equal proportions for every criteria. The total dimension of the sample was around 30 medical staff individuals. The interview guide was built around six discussion topics, topics corresponding with the research objectives.

### **4. Findings**

As regarding the first topic of the interview guide - "What is motivation?", the majority of respondents have had a high availability for dialogue, saying that the research theme is very interesting. This element represents an important condition for the proper conduct of the interviews, as qualitative information are needed and also breaking some psychological barriers of the respondents is sometimes needed too.

The answers for this very first topic put the doctors in the group of persons that have a better than average level of work motivation. For some of the respondents the domain concerning motivation is related with self-development and continuous professional training. Even from the beginning of the discussion it can be point out some opinions which are indicating a strong bound between the doctor and patient satisfaction, seen as an "indicator" of the motivation degree of the doctor.

Also, another conclusion regarding this topic is related with the connection which some of the respondents have made between the current professional motivation and motivation that they have had during the faculty years, the latter being translated after the ending of studies to the current working place. The second topic of the interview is regarding causes and factors that are responsible for the motivation state. The content analysis reveals some elements that occur within responses from all the doctors interviewed. This factors that can influence motivation from the point of view of the doctors are addressing to salary, interpersonal relations and esteem and appreciation from both the colleagues and managers. The importance given to the salary reflects a subjective perception for every respondent.

Motivation of the medical staff is complex being determined as well as intrinsic motives and extrinsic motives. For doctors, a very important aspect is given by the fact that their activity implies doing "medical acts" and not simple provisions like in the case of other services. So, it becomes very obvious in their perception the profound human dimension of the medical activity.

An important element is constituted by the work environment - the networking with the other colleagues, and here we can speak not only about the relationship with other doctors but even with other staff categories - nurses and auxiliary staff.

In terms of networking with the other doctors it can be observed the importance held by the professional equilibrated dialogue, without whom some respondents said they cannot conceive a coherent activity. In their view, a medical institution that would offer the possibility of a free professional dialogue, an unrestrained exchange of ideas and medical opinions is far more attractive than other institutions which are not capable to offer this.

In another line, patient feedback is another extremely important element for most respondents, being considered defining for the quality of their work.

For the younger respondents, the family support represents an important element correlated with the load that is represented by prolonged guards. Many of them admitted that without a direct and consistent support, carrying out their work in specific conditions within the institutions they are currently in will not be possible.

Among the important elements that can be highlighted there is also the role that is played by the professional ethics. This involves a set of moral and professional values which guide the main aspects of the medical activity.

Doctors perceive customer loyalty as an "indicator" of the quality of their work, saying that they are motivated by a high level of patients' fidelity.

Also on the same level of perception, it is manifesting an element, particular for dental healthcare services namely - the doctors' perception about patients' loyalty towards their own person and not necessarily toward the dental office or clinique.

Regarding the possibility to influence patient education in order to achieve a better prevention, doctors believe that this can be obtained through a proper involvement of medical staff and of the educational system - through social campaigns aimed to implement healthcare education within the formal educational process through nursery schools, primary school and even later. A loyal customer in the field of healthcare services may seem a little bit inappropriate, because the status of "customer" is interrelated with the one of a person who seeks healing for a particular disease.

The topic that is referring to the work satisfaction reveals that work satisfaction is given by patients, in some cases respondents arguing that patients sometimes can give them very high moral satisfactions, especially in social cases.

Mainly, work satisfaction motives have been related with:

- appreciation from older colleagues that have a richer clinical experience;
- appreciation from the medical institution management;
- appreciation within medical forums: colleagues, professional associations, NGOs etc.

Regarding the importance that career planning can have amongst doctors, there are not some clear patterns of career planning, there is no career culture amongst young doctors. There have been opinions that said hierarchical relationships and the medical system does not offer viable models of career planning. The majority perception is that they don't find well defined phases with clear objectives related with career or mentors to help them in their definition.

Another discussion topic within the interview guide was about factors that can de-motivate individuals. From this respect, doctors are not satisfied with the way that health related policies are managed by the Romanian government. There is an opinions consensus that the problems of the national health system are not resuming to the low level of salaries. There are problems that are affecting the way that the medical staff can work - the lack of a proper management of raw materials and equipment, the lack of policies regarding the management of the necessary volume of medical staff needed which is determining the phenomenon of blocking positions within the state hospitals. There is a significant opinion difference between medics from the private sector and the ones from state healthcare institutions. Also, doctors from the category entrepreneur - manager have a vehement position against the tax level and financial operations complexity that is forcing many of them to address to external experts (accountants etc.). Doctors have signaled the need that State should provide the possibility of mass communication for information essential to health, which in their perception is not done well and into a proper form in present time.

Many respondents believe that is necessary an initiative which can guarantee the professional independence within the health system.

The possibility of career advancement is seen in a nuanced way by the respondents - the medical staff from the state institution being visible affected by the phenomenon of blocking posts, even on the hierarchic line. The staff from private environment is less affected, in most cases those that have been interviewed saying that they appreciate performance and professionalism criteria.

As other de-motivating factors have been mentioned the communication gaps. There have been opinions which highlight the communication gaps on a hierarchic line with frequent examples of negative feedback or lack of communication itself. Also we have encountered some isolated opinions that put emphasis on the communication gaps between doctors and patients, gaps that were developed because the patients lack of medical knowledge and even the lack of implication from the doctors.

One very important topic of the interview was referring to the relationship between motivation of the medical staff and patients' satisfaction and motivation to consume.

The factors that can influence the healthcare services consumers' satisfaction in doctor's opinion can be synthetized on the following directions:

- The quality of the doctor - patient relationship, the doctor capacity to be empathic and to offer the most familiar relational framework possible, the patients need to be understood.
- The quality of actual performances, provisions (the patients quality standards have increased over time, and they became better informed).
- The quality of medical act management (compliance of the schedules, ease of making them, the office ambience, the medical materials quality etc).
- Facilities provided (easy access to the office/medical clinic, the working hours etc).

Even if the vast majority of the interviewed doctors have declared that the patient satisfaction or content represents a powerful motivational factor, the doctors have some different attitudes:

- Doctors that are really interested in their patient satisfaction, at an individual level, they ensure every time that the level of patient satisfaction is high and as appropriate as it can be.
- Doctors that are interested in patient satisfaction but believes it must make further efforts only in serious cases or that are requiring long-term treatment.

- Doctors who said they are interested in patient satisfaction but could not be more explicit about how this actually works.

Doctors have been asked about the role that they have in the process of provision of high quality services and how important they think they are for the patients.

The answers have been also divided in three layers:

- A. Persons that have declared previously that the patient satisfaction is extremely important, have had no reservations about the role which they could have into relation with patients, considering that it is their responsibility to initiate and manage this relationship;
- B. Doctors that have stated only declarative that patient satisfaction is a goal are saying that there are other important factors in addition to their own involvement.

In terms of the ways in which we can determine the level of satisfaction of the patients, only 6 respondents identified the possible use of a satisfaction questionnaire regularly and consistently, the rest of the respondents considering that a discussion with the patients is enough.

Also there were opinions that the nurses and front – office employees should be concerned with this issue – measuring patients' satisfaction.

The general view of those interviewed was that work satisfaction is very important in the medical field and it can determine a supplementary patient motivation.

At this point it has raised again the opinion that doctors are doing medical acts and not merely services provisions and therefore their motivation is an intrinsic one, linked to the specific professional values and ethics.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

Putting together conclusions drawn from the scientific literature and the results of the present research we are able to highlight some important aspects concerning the topic of medical staff motivation into the present.

Even if the economic and social conditions that are characterizing the Romanian economy are determining also the importance of some extrinsic motivational variables like salary, benefits and working conditions, in case of Romanian doctors, the results of the research are showing the great importance that intrinsic motivational factors have also. The perception that they are doing medical acts and not simple "services provisions" is showing that doctors can be motivated by the very nature of their work, and not merely by the salary or incentives. Also, the fact that they are more attracted by medical institutions that can provide a professional environment characterized by the dialogue between colleagues and the sharing of professional knowledge and practice is another element sustaining the idea of strong intrinsic motivational factors. The modern physician portrait shows that there is a cultural model shared by many specialists - the highly cultured individual, who is integrating successfully the internet technology in his daily professional preoccupations, is using social media communication channels and is eager to share information and knowledge with colleagues and other specialists in the field. This modern type of specialist is also adapted to a new level of communication with the postmodern patient, finding ways and means of communication common with each other. So the work motivation in this case will be built not only on some external incentives but especially on internal motives related to sharing patient satisfaction, and expression of his own professional value. In the extrinsic layer of motivation we may find important elements related with the possibility to share scientific community opinions, appreciation from older colleagues and institution management.

The present research was meant to be an exploratory demarche, being limited by the specific features of a qualitative type research (lack of representativeness). The complexity of the topic and the multiple relationship between the variables that can measure the medical staff motivation impose a greater research effort, consisting of a series of investigations as statistic representative research taking into account different samples as: different types of healthcare employees (doctors, nurses, administrative personnel), different layers (top managers, middle managers, doctors with their own medical office etc.), and even different medical specialties. Only this type of approach can assure sufficient data to obtain a broader and clearer image about the complex topic of medical staff motivation.

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