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METEOR Newsletter

Supporting and retaining
health care workers
– Insights from Project METEOR

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From the Editors

As Project METEOR draws to a close, we are now in full-speed result dissemination mode. Over the last three months, we have been busy finalising our papers and Toolbox, and presenting our findings during events.

Our paper titled "Intention to leave, depersonalisation, and job satisfaction in physicians and nurses: a cross-sectional study in Europe" was published in *Scientific Reports*. More papers are currently under review, and we hope to see them

published soon.

We also shared our findings and recommendations on how to prevent the outflow of physicians and nurses from hospitals in Europe with 200 participants of the webinar "Health Workforce Challenges: Ways Forward for Policy-making," organised by the EU Health Policy Platform. In this issue of our Newsletter, we highlight some recommendations that we developed jointly with physicians, nurses, health assistants, hospital management, and policymakers during our project.

We are delighted to see that our results have captured the interest of journalists, and we are eager to discuss our research further.

Stay tuned for more exciting developments from Project METEOR.

METEOR RESULTS:



Project METEOR offers tips on preventing doctors and nurses from quitting their jobs

The European healthcare sector is grappling with an alarming workforce shortage, prompting urgent calls for strategies to retain existing staff. To address the outflow of workers, researchers from the EU-funded Project METEOR offer practical solutions that hospital managers and policymakers can implement across four key areas: personal and professional development; education; finance; and regulatory measures.

The METEOR study revealed that 17% of physicians and 9% of nurses have expressed an intention to leave their current hospital, while 9% of physicians and 14% of nurses intended to leave the healthcare profession. Healthcare workers also pointed out factors that influence their decisions, with low job satisfaction, growing depersonalisation, and emotional exhaustion playing a key role.

"We tend to think that to keep healthcare staff we need to pay them more, but while money is an important factor, it's not always sufficient," says Anke Boone, a METEOR researcher from KU Leuven. "We found, for instance, that what matters for physicians and nurses is professional and personal support that they can get from their employer. And to improve this, we need to introduce changes on the organisational level."

The METEOR team conducted workshops with physicians, nurses, health assistants, hospital management, and policymakers to gain in-depth insights into what can be done to prevent the outflow of physicians and nurses from hospitals in Europe. While the research primarily focused on Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland, many recommendations are universal and applicable in other countries while taking into

account country- and hospital-specific factors.

“We used this bottom-up approach and asked practitioners what is not working in their hospitals and what can be done to fix it,” says Lode Godderis, Professor from KU Leuven. “The area that was most often indicated as relevant to increase job satisfaction was professional and personal support.”

In response to this finding, and based on input from stakeholders, METEOR researchers recommend a wide range of interventions that could be beneficial to improve job retention. For instance, introducing regular interdisciplinary team meetings. Such meetings can help solve conflicts, offer opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing, and enhance teamwork. As result they improve the work experience. Another solution often suggested by respondents is leadership training programmes. Such programmes can help healthcare workers, who are experts in their clinical field, improve their managerial skills, which will translate into better division of tasks and teamwork.

Education is another area important for addressing job retention. METEOR researchers recommend for example introducing of periodic technical training, such as scenario training related to medical procedures, as well as programmes for developing soft skills, communication, and time management. Hospitals also need to invest in onboarding and mentorship programmes. Effective instruction, training, and guidance during the initial career phase are particularly important for the younger generation.

Regarding financial matters, METEOR researchers suggest better allocation of resources. Insight from respondents indicates that competitive and fair salary structures are very important for healthcare workers. Decision-makers should also ensure adequate investments in infrastructure. This means providing sufficient professional tools and medical equipment to perform tasks, investment in decent computers and technology, and upgrading hospital buildings.

In the regulatory field, healthcare professionals call for the introduction of a fixed worker-to-patient ratio. This could help solve the problem of staff shortages and ensure that doctors, nurses, and other staff have a reasonable amount of work and can provide adequate patient care. Many respondents also mentioned the need for instruments to monitor workloads.

“The retention of healthcare workers can be improved by the implementation of a comprehensive approach that combines professional and personal support, educational interventions, financial provisions, and regulatory enhancements,” says Olivia Lavreysen, another METEOR researcher from KU Leuven.

The full list of recommendations can be found [here](#).



METEOR research published in *Scientific Reports*

The European healthcare sector faces a deepening staffing crisis as almost one in ten doctors and even more nurses intend to leave their professions, a Project METEOR study found. The researchers also identify the reasons why employees quit, which can help governments and hospital administrators combat the trend.

In an article published in the journal *Scientific Reports*, METEOR researchers discuss the results of a survey they conducted among staff of eight hospitals in four countries, which shows 9% of doctors and nearly 14% of nurses declared their intention to leave their profession, citing low job satisfaction, growing depersonalisation, and emotional exhaustion as the primary factors influencing their decisions.

The turnover crisis comes as the sector struggles with an existing shortage of medical

personnel. Projections from the World Health Organization indicate that in six years, Europe will need 18.2 million healthcare workers to meet the growing demand for healthcare services driven by an ageing population and increased prevalence of chronic diseases.

“European hospitals are already struggling with vacancies, and it’s worrying that so many doctors and nurses are considering leaving their profession,” said Domenica Matranga, a professor at the University of Palermo (UNIPA) and co-author of the study. “We cannot afford to lose these people, so we need to find out what to do to keep them.”

METEOR researchers conducted a cross-sectional survey that gathered answers from 381 physicians and 1,351 nurses at hospitals in Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, and Poland. The questionnaire consisted of 76 questions about participants’ intention to exit the profession, intentions to leave their current hospital and the factors that influenced their decision to quit.

The survey also revealed that there is a large group of healthcare professionals who are dissatisfied with their current employer. More doctors than nurses are considering leaving their current jobs, with rates of 16.3% versus 8.4% respectively.

“Many doctors want to leave their current workplaces because of the management and personal issues,” said UNIPA’s Laura Maniscalco, a co-author of the paper. “In the high-stress environment of a hospital, they can face challenges in terms of work-life balance or conflicts that can result in bullying. Additionally, the ineffectiveness of the management system and understaffing can force them to work in areas outside of their expertise, leading to role conflicts and reducing opportunities for career advancement.”

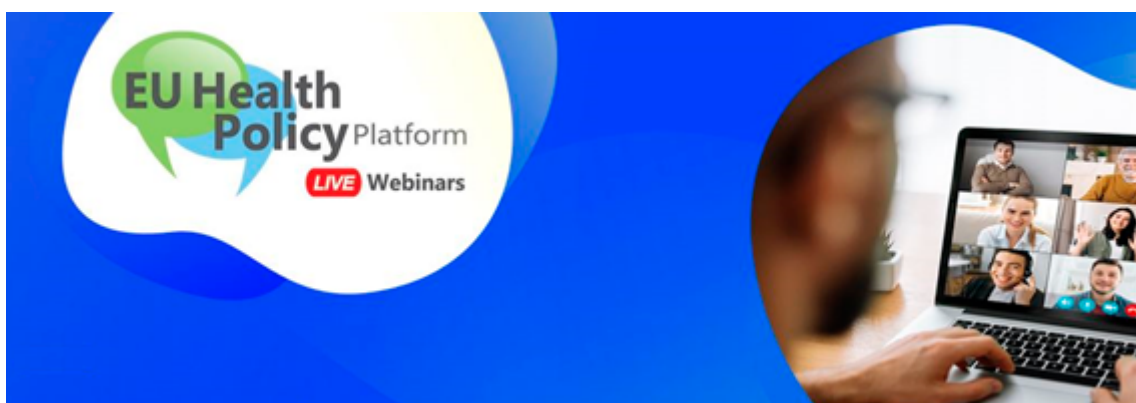
Nurses showed a higher intention to leave the profession than to change their workplace. This situation can be explained by a rapid decline in working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents said dealing with death, stigmatisation, and the risk of infection were the crucial factors increasing their stress.

“Our research suggests that nurses may no longer find their job rewarding or valued,” Matranga said. “This issue is connected with relatively low salaries, tough working conditions and, of course, the physical and emotional pressure caused by the pandemic.”

The authors urge healthcare managers to devise effective retention strategies, taking into account job satisfaction, work engagement, and a positive working climate. Such internal policies are crucial, given the difficulty of finding replacements for departing professionals.

The full article can be read [here](#).

SHARING OUR RESEARCH:



METEOR researchers share recommendations on healthcare worker retention at EUHPP webinar

METEOR researchers Lode Godderis and Anke Boone presented the project’s findings at the webinar “Health Workforce Challenges: Ways Forward for Policy-

making”, organised by the EU Health Policy Platform on 26 January. The event attracted more than 200 participants from across the region.

Building on the three-year research project, Godderis and Boone presented policy recommendations on how to prevent nurses and doctors from leaving their hospital jobs. Godderis underscored the importance of adopting a holistic approach to address retention in hospitals across Europe, highlighting four areas for change.

First, he stressed the importance of professional and personal support for workers through initiatives such as transformational leadership, sabbaticals, and adoption of a self-rostering system. Second, he pointed to education and development, emphasising the importance of an active approach to technical, medical, and soft skills training, as well as mentorship and peer support groups. Financial incentives are the third area where changes are needed. Here, solutions include competitive salaries, permanent contracts, and other measures increasing job security. Finally, changes in the regulatory environment can also help keep healthcare workers at their posts. Adjusting rules for the worker-to-patient ratio, adopting the Care Burden Instrument & Monitoring, and defining new roles and functions are just a few examples of regulatory solutions that can help stabilise employment.

During the discussion, Anke Boone stressed that there is no “magic bullet” that will immediately solve healthcare staff shortages, emphasising the need for concerted and multifaceted action. She addressed the persistent challenge of an imbalance between supply and demand of healthcare workers, which results from a shortage of trained employees, inefficient task planning, and flawed management of available resources.

Additionally, she explored the relationship between medical deserts and worker retention. Boone argued that medical deserts, characterised by a scarcity of medical professionals in certain fields, intensify workforce retention issues. Professionals often leave understaffed regions due to challenges such as a lack of transport, expertise, colleagues, and social support, all of which contribute to burnout and job dissatisfaction.

The webinar was hosted by Matthias Wismar of the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies. Researchers from the four other projects in the Health Workforce Project Cluster took part in the discussion: Giovanni Baglio (OASES), Ronald Batenburg (ROUTE-HWF), Corinne Hinlopen (AHEAD), and Eszter Kovacs (TaSHI).

Sabine Stordeur, Director General of the Belgian DG Public Health, also joined the event to discuss her country’s EU presidency and share insights into planned initiatives in the area of healthcare policy.

METEOR IN THE MEDIA:



Anke Boone discusses healthcare workers’ situation in interview with *Artsenkrant*

In an interview with *Artsenkrant*, a leading Belgian magazine for physicians, Project METEOR researcher Anke Boone shed light on Project METEOR’s findings regarding the situation of healthcare professionals in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis.

“We need structural adjustments to overcome problems connected with mental well-

being and burnout among healthcare staff, which only increased during the pandemic,” said Boone, a PhD researcher at KU Leuven’s Centre for Environment and Health. “Our study, conducted in eight hospitals across four countries (Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland), shows that 15% of nurses and 10% of doctors wanted to leave their hospital jobs. Changes in hospitals’ culture and in work-life balance are key to improving healthcare workers’ job quality and nurturing a resilient system that empowers and supports the next generation of doctors.”

METEOR researchers found that job satisfaction, career development, and work-life balance play a significant role in influencing healthcare professionals’ decisions to stay in their current positions. The scholars proposed solutions such as onboarding and mentoring programmes to retain healthcare professionals and address the challenges posed by labour shortages, which have been intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic and increased retirements in the healthcare sector.

The interview (in Dutch) is available [here](#).



Domenica Matranga discusses METEOR’s findings with [blogsicilia.it](#)

In a recent interview with BlogSicilia.it, University of Palermo Professor Domenica Matranga, a medical statistician and researcher at Project METEOR, discussed shortages of healthcare workers and the challenges of retention in light of the project’s recent findings.

“We sought to understand what the determinants of leaving hospital jobs are, and we interviewed around 1,400 nurses and around 400 doctors in the four countries,” Matranga told the key regional news website. “Several structural weaknesses contribute to the problem, especially disproportionate workload and task assignments not aligned with professionals’ skills due to staff shortages in many departments.”

Data gathered by METEOR shows that in Italy, 19% of doctors and 8% of nurses intend to leave their hospitals, and the issue is most dire in areas such as smaller islands and Sicily. Other countries are also grappling with healthcare worker shortages and the retention of doctors and nurses.

The METEOR study’s findings underscore the urgency of addressing workforce retention in the European healthcare sector, especially amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and an ageing population. The project’s scholars propose solutions such as onboarding and mentoring programmes, and changing hospital culture, to retain healthcare professionals and address the labour shortages.

During the interview, Matranga also discussed how artificial intelligence (AI) can help healthcare workers with tasks such as diagnosis, predicting outcomes, and patient care. She stressed the importance of carefully planned studies to check how well AI tools work in these areas.

The interview (in Italian) is available [here](#).

METEOR project shows EU hospital clinicians ready to quit as retention issues



Results of METEOR survey featured in *Hospital Healthcare Europe*

METEOR research on the scale and reasons behind the exodus of nurses and physicians from European hospitals was recently featured in [Hospital Healthcare Europe](#), a website providing hospital managers with insights on best practices in clinical care and specialist services.

The article discusses findings from [a survey](#) conducted by METEOR researchers among staff of eight hospitals in four countries. The survey revealed that 9% of doctors and nearly 14% of nurses declared their intention to leave their profession, citing low job satisfaction, growing depersonalisation, and emotional exhaustion as the primary factors influencing their decisions.

The survey also showed that a significant share of healthcare professionals is dissatisfied with their current employer, with 16.3% of doctors and 8.4% of nurses considering leaving their current workplace.

Factors such as ineffective management systems, conflicts, understaffing, and a lack of work-life balance contribute to these decisions.



Project METEOR (Mental health: focus on retention of healthcare workers)

aims to increase scientific knowledge about why workers in European Union health professions change jobs. It seeks to identify and analyse the main predictors of job retention in four European countries (Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland); develop evidence-based policy recommendations through continuous stakeholder engagement; and present these results in an easily accessible online toolbox. The project is executed by KU Leuven, the Medical University of Silesia, the University of Palermo, Spaarne Gasthuis, and Aldgate Strategy Group. The project is co-funded by the 3rd Health Programme of the European Union. To find out more visit our website: www.meteorproject.eu



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