



Determinants of intention to leave among nurses and physicians in a hospital setting during COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review and meta-analysis

Neeltje de Vries^a, Laura Maniscalco^b, Domenica Matranga^b, José Bouman^a, J. Peter de Winter^{a,c}
^aSpaarne Gasthuis, the Netherlands. ^bUniversity of Palermo, Italy. ^cKU Leuven, Belgium.



Introduction

The global outbreak of COVID-19 has brought to light the profound impact that large-scale disease outbreaks can have on healthcare systems and the dedicated professionals who serve within them. It becomes increasingly important to explore strategies for retaining nurses and physicians within hospital settings during such challenging times. This paper aims to investigate the determinants of retention among nurses and physicians during the COVID-19 pandemic

Methodology

A systematic review of other potential determinants impacting retention rates during the pandemic was carried out within four electronic databases. Secondly, a meta-analysis on the prevalence of intention to leave for nurses and physicians during the COVID-19 pandemic

Results

On March 17 2023 we enrolled our search in four electronic databases (nb. Cinahl, Embase, PubMed and Web of Science) resulting in 2261 hits. Fifty-five papers were included in the systematic review, whereas thirty-three papers fulfilled the eligibility criteria for the meta-analysis.

The systematic review resulted in six themes of determinants impacting intention to leave:

- Personal characteristics (e.g. gender, age, health)
- Job demands (e.g. burnout, moral distress, psychological resilience)
- Employment services (e.g. working experience, working hours, salary)
- Working conditions (e.g. fear of COVID-19, taking care of suspected COVID-19 patients, personal protective equipment)
- Work relationships (e.g. organisational commitment, conflicts with colleagues)
- Organisational culture. (e.g. organisational support, social support)

Meta-analysis showed a prevalence of intent to leave the current job of 38% for nurses (95% CI: 26%-51%) and 29% for physicians (95% CI: 21%-39%), whereas intention to leave the profession for nurses 28% (95% CI: 21%-34%) and 24% for physicians (95% CI: 23%-25%).

Discussion

Earlier meta-analysis before the COVID-19 pandemic on intensive care nurses described a prevalence of intention to leave of 27%¹. These outcomes suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the intention to quit the job for, by all means, nurses. Similar, comparable literature on physicians in a hospital setting is lacking.

Remarkably, the authors found that both young and older healthcare workers are at risk for the intention to leave during the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, being older is a risk factor during a crisis, whereas it is a protective factor under normal circumstances². It is hypothetic that ageing healthcare workers feel exhausted after years of working in healthcare, and the pandemic may create extra stress. This circumstance can result in earlier retirement determined by the COVID-19 pandemic, confirmed by earlier research³. Furthermore, literature described that older healthcare workers were worried about their health risks due to COVID-19, which made them decide to retire early³. It suggests that the power and impact of aging on the intention to leave may differ from normal circumstances and a crisis.

Conclusion

The findings of this paper showed the critical need for hospital managers to address the concerning increase in nurses' and physicians' intentions to leave during the COVID-19 pandemic. This intention to leave is affected by a complex conjunction of multiple determinants, including the fear of COVID-19 and the confidence in and availability of personal protective equipment. Moreover, individual factors like age, experience, burnout symptoms, and support are maintained in this review. Understanding the influence of determinants on retention during the COVID-19 pandemic offers an opportunity to formulate prospective strategies for retaining nurses and physicians within hospital settings.

References

1. Xu G, Zeng X, Wu X. Global prevalence of turnover intention among intensive care nurses: A meta-analysis. *Nurs Crit Care* 2023; 28: 159–166. pmid:34261191
2. de Vries N, Boone A, Godderis L, et al. The Race to Retain Healthcare Workers: A Systematic Review on Factors that Impact Retention of Nurses and Physicians in Hospitals. *Inquiry* 2023; 60: 469580231159318.
3. Ní Léime Á, O'Neill M. The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Working Lives and Retirement Timing of Older Nurses in Ireland. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*; 18. Epub ahead of print September 2021. pmid:34639360