METEOR Newsletter
Supporting and retaining health care workers
– Insights from Project METEOR
#4

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From the Editors

As we wrap up the METEOR project, this final issue of our Newsletter marks the conclusion of three years of research into the problem of retention of physicians and nurses in hospitals across Europe. We hope that our findings will help healthcare managers and policymakers at the local, national, and European levels address the challenge of hospital staff turnover. Our research papers, policy briefs, booklet, and toolbox will assist them in designing evidence-based strategies to retain physicians and nurses, ultimately enhancing the quality of care provided in hospitals.

In this issue, we write more about the booklet and toolbox, two recent project outcomes. Each offers a concise summary of METEOR's findings, shedding light on the motivations behind healthcare workers' intentions to leave and offering ideas for

how to persuade them to stay.

We also provide a short summary of our most recent paper about the impact of COVID-19 on nurses' and doctors' job retention and turnover. The paper discusses the key factors driving the surge in medical staff's intention to leave and calls for hospital managers to address the crisis still impacting medical personnel.

We also write about the METEOR researchers' presentation at the 34th International Conference of Occupational Health (ICOH) in Marrakesh, Morocco.

Looking ahead, our website will remain active, ensuring continuous access to our findings for researchers, hospital managers, and policymakers. The project's impact extends beyond its conclusion, and we hope new research initiatives and projects will build upon our results. We are confident that our work will continue to yield positive results in the future!

Happy reading!

MESSAGE FROM THE COORDINATORS:

Our three-year research project gives valuable insights into healthcare worker retention

In European healthcare policy, one of the most pressing challenges is the retention of skilled workers. The METEOR project, a collaborative research effort spanning four European countries — Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, and Italy — has been working diligently to tackle this issue over the past three years.

The overarching objective of METEOR was threefold. Firstly, we aimed to deepen our understanding of the current literature on the main determinants of job retention, while also examining existing interventions and policies. Secondly, we identified and analysed the determinants across eight participating hospitals in those four countries. Lastly, METEOR aimed to develop actionable policy recommendations through continuous engagement with stakeholders, and present these recommendations in an accessible online toolbox.

To achieve these goals, METEOR undertook activities including systematic reviews on retention determinants and interventions, and analysis of micro-level policy documents from the participating hospitals. Furthermore, we developed a comprehensive questionnaire to assess job retention, and we collected and analysed survey data from a representative sample of healthcare workers. Finally, stakeholder workshops were organized to co-create policy recommendations, culminating in the development of the

online toolbox.

The outputs produced by METEOR are impressive and comprehensive, ranging from systematic reviews and policy analyses to a list of actionable recommendations and the creation of our online toolbox. Importantly, the project remained on schedule throughout its duration, ensuring timely delivery of outcomes.

However, the work wasn't without its challenges. Consortium members identified issues such as administrative challenges, cultural differences, and difficulties with online communication. Nevertheless, proactive communication, regular team meetings, two real-life meetings, advanced planning, and innovative team exercises helped the consortium overcome these obstacles and stay on track.

As we reflect on METEOR's accomplishments, it's clear that collaborative efforts such as these are crucial in addressing complex policy issues. By leveraging diverse expertise and fostering active engagement, METEOR has not only deepened the understanding of job retention but has also paved the way for future research.

Warm regards,

The Coordinators
Anke Boone,
Lode Godderis,
Olivia Lavreysen.

NEW METEOR RESOURCES:

Project METEOR offers practical guidelines to help retain healthcare workers

Retention is crucial for the quality of European health systems. Despite having more physicians, nurses, and primary care workers than ever before, Europe faces an increasing shortage of these professionals as demand for them is growing, driven by an ageing population and the increasing prevalence of chronic disorders.

In a survey conducted among the staff of eight hospitals in four countries, METEOR researchers found that 9% of doctors and nearly 14% of nurses expressed their intention to leave their profession. The survey also revealed that a significant share of healthcare professionals is dissatisfied with their current employers. Dissatisfaction is higher among medical doctors, 16.3% of whom are considering leaving their current jobs. Among nurses, 8.4% intend to leave their current employer.
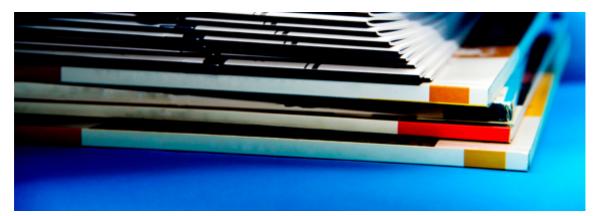
"Our research consortium spent the last three years investigating the retention problem among hospital workers in Europe, and our work has been published in academic journals," says Anke Boone, researcher of consortium member KU Leuven. "But we believe that the labour shortages are so profound that we need to discuss them not only with fellow researchers but also with other stakeholders. Hence, these two publications."

The booklet: *SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO? Understanding and Enhancing Healthcare Worker Retention in Europe* summarises in a nutshell the findings of METEOR research. The publication can help a broader audience understand why so many hospital employees in Europe are considering leaving their jobs. It explains their motivations, pointing out factors such as low job satisfaction and stressful work environments. It

also suggests solutions that can help reverse the trend by implementing changes in areas including professional and personal support, education, regulation, and financial incentives.

The toolbox is an interactive and easy-to-navigate online tool available on the [METEOR website](#). It can assist healthcare managers and policymakers in exploring the context of decisions to quit, and in crafting policies aimed at improving retention and job satisfaction. Users can focus on areas of their professional interest and find specific recommendations tailored to their positions and specific challenges. Drawing from METEOR's research, including data analysis and discussions with healthcare professionals and experts, the toolbox equips hospital managers and policymakers with insights and actionable tools for enhancing job retention.

"We hope that the data we have gathered and the recommendations we have developed over our three years of research will prove useful for policymakers and healthcare managers throughout Europe as they struggle to address the important issue of worker retention," says Olivia Lavreysen, a researcher from KU Leuven.

METEOR PUBLICATIONS:

COVID-19 pandemic triggers surge in medical staff intention to leave

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the number of nurses and doctors considering leaving their hospital jobs increased substantially, a recent article by the EU-funded METEOR Project shows. The publication stresses the need to create strategies to counteract this tendency, as it endangers the quality of medical care.

In the article, "Determinants of intention to leave among nurses and physicians in a hospital setting during the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review and meta-analysis", Neeltje de Vries, Laura Maniscalco, Domenica Matranga, José Bouman and Peter de Winter analysed articles in four scientific literature databases: PubMed, Embase, CINAHL, and Web of Science, discussing the impact of COVID-19 on nurses' and doctors' job retention and turnover.

The study found that 38% of nurses declared their intention to leave their current hospital job and 28% to exit the profession. Similarly, 29% of physicians intended to leave their current positions, and 24% wanted to quit the medical field.

"Our study revealed that COVID-19 exacerbated the existing problem of medical staff retention," said Neeltje de Vries, an expert in nursing science from Spaarne Gasthuis. "The lesson learnt is that future pandemics or sudden surges in healthcare demand can lead to an outflow of nurses and doctors, putting even more strain on our healthcare system."

The study found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, thoughts about quitting were triggered by a complex mix of causes, such as the fear of the virus and limited availability of protective equipment, as well as individual factors like age, experience, and burnout.

"This systematic review revealed burnout symptoms as a primary cause that correlated with the intention to leave during the COVID-19 pandemic," said Laura Maniscalco, a researcher at Università degli Studi di Palermo. "Stress, heavy workloads and working night shifts have all contributed to the exhaustion of workers. As previous research shows, epidemics negatively impact the mental health of nurses and physicians, in some cases leading to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)."

While previous literature showed that in normal times more experienced medical workers were less likely to quit their hospital jobs, the pandemic significantly increased seasoned workers' willingness to leave.

"Experienced nurses and physicians felt overwhelmed by the pandemic, possibly never having seen a crisis like this before despite their years of practice," said Neeltje de Vries. "Many of them were also in fear for their own lives, which could have contributed to them wanting to quit."

The paper underscored the urgent need for hospital managers to address the crisis that is still impacting medical personnel. Research shows that by targeting key determinants such as fear, burnout, and lack of support, hospitals could foster a supportive environment that retains experienced personnel and attracts new talent, enhancing the quality of services.

You can read the paper here.

de Vries N, Maniscalco L, Matranga D, Bouman J, de Winter JP. Determinants of intention to leave among nurses and physicians in a hospital setting during the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review and meta-analysis. PLoS One. 2024 Mar 14;19(3):e0300377. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0300377. PMID: 38484008; PMCID: PMC10939201.

METEOR AT EVENTS:

Meteor results presented at ICOH in Marrakesh

METEOR researchers presented the project's results at the 34th International Conference of Occupational Health (ICOH) in Marrakesh, Morocco. The conference, held from 28 April to 3 May, brought together hundreds of researchers from around the world.

Neeltje de Vries (Spaarne Gasthuis) presented the results of METEOR's systematic review that showed the critical need for hospital managers to address the increase during the COVID-19 pandemic in nurses' and physicians' intentions to leave their jobs. This intention was influenced by various factors, such as fear of the virus and limited availability of protective equipment, as well as individual factors like age, experience, and burnout. De Vries argued that recognising these determinants offered a chance to develop better strategies for retaining healthcare professionals.

Presenting METEOR's results on enhancing workforce stability in healthcare, Olivia Lavreysen (KU Leuven) highlighted the importance of implementing a comprehensive strategy to retain healthcare workers. Lavreysen demonstrated a range of evidence-based interventions, from areas of personal and professional support, through education and financial incentives, to regulation. She argued that these interventions should take into account country-specific factors and variations in healthcare systems. The study emphasised the need to combine interventions from different areas to create a supportive environment. See Olivia presentation here.

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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