



Health workforce shortage in Italian-speaking Switzerland: What countermeasures might be most effective?

Oral Presentation (Scientific)

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Background: Health workforce shortage is a well-known problem in Europe. In Switzerland, approximately 46% of registered nurses do leave their profession and newly graduates may fill only half of the present job vacancies. In 2016 the regional government of the Canton Ticino did thus set up a task force to identify viable measures to counter the current nursing workforce shortage. Research question Which measures might be most effective to counter the current nursing workforce shortage in Ticino?

Method and material: First, the project responsible searched the international literature to identify scientifically evaluated recommendations (causal relation between interventions and outcome measures) in the field of recruitment and retention of health professionals. Secondly, to compare these recommendations with measures already promoted by local health care providers, an online survey was performed in 2017. To guarantee an adequate mix of public and private providers, a purposive sample of 23 institutions was recruited. Finally, the results were presented to study participants and other interested stakeholders by means of a press conference and two informative meetings in 2018.

Results: HRM-managers and/or members from the directorial board of 17 health care providers [response rate 74%] did take part [primary care n=8; domiciliary care n=5; elderly care homes n=4]. Various best-practice recommendations from the international literature to recruit and retain health care personnel seem already to be in place in over two-thirds of participating institutions, namely: promotion campaigns to attract young nurses to health care, encouraging training and education for a life-long career as well as the promotion of good working environments (family friendly, employee participation). Other important recommendations were, however, not mentioned by the study participants, like for example measures to encourage the return to practice, the provision of a supportive environment for ageing employees or attracting professionals by extending their practice and advanced roles.

Discussion: International experts in the field of recruitment and retention strategies for health professionals do highlight that packages of interventions have proven to be more effective than single interventions. To achieve this aim, some essential interventions seem still lacking in Ticino. It is for example most interesting that none of the participating institutions did mention "measures to encourage the return to practice" as a current practice. Especially as the online survey revealed that in all participating health care organizations only 19 out of 355 newly employed nurses during the year 2015 were returning to work, whereas as much as 93 nurses did leave the job in the same calendar year for family reasons (maternity or take care of elderly parents).

Conclusions: Although various interventions recommended in the international literature to contrast nurse workforce shortage have already been put in place by healthcare employers in Ticino, there is room for improvement. Measures to encourage the return to practice, to provide a supportive environment for ageing employees as well as to attract professionals by extending their practice and advanced roles seem currently the most promising supplementary countermeasures to introduce.