

Experiences of public doctors in managing work difficulties and maintaining professional enthusiasm in acute general hospitals: implication for medical education

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Background:

Overseas studies suggested that 10 to 20% of doctors were depressed, 30 to 45% had burnout, and many reported dissatisfaction with work-life balance. A local study on public doctors showed that 31.4% of the respondents satisfied the criteria for high burn-out. Young but moderately experienced doctors who needed to work in shifts appeared most vulnerable. This study aimed to explore the experiences of those public doctors on how to manage their work difficulties and maintain professional enthusiasm. These can be used as references for improving medical education.

Summary of Work:

Ten public doctors from 3 acute general hospitals were invited to an in-depth interview individually. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Content analysis was carried out to identify major themes in relation to the research questions.

Summary of Results:

Difficulties encountered were mainly from 1) managing people, mostly patients, followed by colleagues and then patients' relatives; 2) constraints at work, including time and resources. 3) managing self, for the need to make quick decisions.

Their ways to manage work difficulties included 1) self-adjustment with most frequently, good communication, followed by demonstrating caring attitude and accumulating clinical experiences; 2) seeking help from colleagues; 3) setting up good departmental policies.

Maintaining work enthusiasm comes from 1) self enhancement by finding meaning at work, followed by sense of vocation, and help from religion. Others including continuing education, maintaining harmonious family relationships and participating in voluntary works; 2) Job challenges; 3) Positive feedback from patients; 4) Support from organization.

Conclusions:

Implications for improving medical education included developing good communication skills, accepting personal limitations and seeking for help, preparing for clinical mentoring and awareness of the motivating force of spirituality/religion.