Morale

Morale within the health professions was a topic for discussion in the Conversation on Health. The importance of addressing issues related to morale, staff shortages and workload, appreciation and recognition, workplace conditions and culture among health professionals were highlighted in many discussions and submissions. Here is a selection of what British Columbians had to say on the subject of morale.

Staff Shortages and Workload

Many participants agree that health care professionals are frustrated, discouraged and over-worked. They feel that the workload is so large that burnout seems inevitable, resulting in compromised patient care. Some health practitioners have left the profession because the strain of work prevents them from taking pride in the quality of care they provided. Participants feel that, due to shortages, finding a general practitioner who currently accepts new patients is difficult. Others think there is little incentive for doctors to provide good service because there is no competition for patients.

Appreciation and Recognition

Appreciation and recognition sparked significant debate in the Conversation on Health. Some participants express concerns that health professionals do not feel valued. They feel that medical professionals have little control over their work environment and are sometimes disheartened that patient numbers remain continuous regardless of their efforts. Other participants note that medical professionals may be discouraged that their input about improvements to the system may not be acted upon. However, some opinions indicate that some health professionals do consider their jobs rewarding and have long, diverse careers.

If staff feel recognized they will work with us to solve issues and increase productivity.

–Workshops Flip Chart Health Human Resources, Vancouver

Workplace Conditions

Most British Columbians who participated in the Conversation on Health feel hospital standards have deteriorated and the level of professionalism has lessened. This, they argue, has reduced the sense of pride medical professionals feel in the workplace.
There are not enough staff, not enough operating time and a high occurrence of infection within medical facilities. Too many beds have been closed, which has increased the stress on medical professionals. Participants state that hospital administration has not been proactive in improving working conditions, resulting in more staff resignations and illness. Many believe the health authorities do not support or encourage healthy lifestyles for their employees, and people have been poorly supervised leading to a drop in morale. Overall, the quality of life at work for medical professionals was considered to be low.

*Promote healthier staff. Provide stress-free areas for breaks, healthier food onsite, physical activity opportunities, showers for cycling to work, jogging at lunch, and subsidize gym/recreation centre memberships.*
- Health Professional Forum Focus Group, Castlegar

**Culture among Health Professionals**

There has been a loss of team atmosphere in hospitals, which has resulted in inadequate communication between health professionals, according to some participants. Some suggest that the urgent nature of the work prevents health professionals from forming relationships with colleagues. Others suggest territorialism among professionals drains resources, energy and the focus required for solution building. Many participants agree that unclear lines of communication and a failure to work together can lead to medical mistakes, resulting in serious health issues for patients.

*What would improve health care delivery is what would improve any product: being treated consistently, honestly and fairly by the employer, which instills pride into the work life of the employee.*
- Mail

**Conclusion**

Many participants agree that medical professionals are over-worked and under a great deal of stress. This, combined with the loss of camaraderie within the health care system, has undermined morale. More attention needs to be paid to encouraging healthy lifestyles for health professionals and the work environment should be changed to facilitate and strengthen communication between professionals.
Morale

This chapter includes the following topics:

**Staff Shortages and Workloads**
**Appreciation and Recognition**
**Workplace Conditions**
**Culture among Health Professionals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Related Electronic Written Submissions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health Human Resource Responses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submitted by the BC College of Family Physicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Submission to the Conversation on Health</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia Cancer Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Submission to the Conversation on Health</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia Government and Service Employees’ Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Submission to the Conversation on Health</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC Nurses’ Union</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Related Chapters**

Many of the topics discussed by participants in the Conversation on Health overlap; additional feedback related to this theme may be found in other chapters including: **Information Technology, E-Health and Electronic Health Records; Primary Health Care; Health Care Models and Collaboration in the System.**
Staff Shortages and Workloads

Comments and Concerns

Staff Shortages
Shortage of Nurses
Workloads

- Comments on the outcomes of staff shortages:
  - It is difficult in British Columbia to find a general practitioner who is accepting new patients.
  - Patient care is compromised and stress levels are high due to staff shortages.
  - Medical professionals must perform additional tasks outside of their job description because of staff shortages.
  - Fatigue and shortages sometimes results in staff performing tasks they are not qualified for.
  - Hospital staff are cynical and exhausted. The workloads are so enormous that burnout is inevitable.
  - There is not enough staff or operating time and a high occurrence of infection in health care facilities.
  - Health care professionals cannot meet patient service expectations because they are already working beyond capacity.
  - Shortages put pressure on staff to work overtime, which lowers morale.
  - Shortages make it is difficult for staff to get time off work.
  - Medical institutions are turning employees into patients. They are overworked and understaffed, causing employees to become sick or injured, or take stress leave due to burn out.
  - Some health professionals choose to work part-time to avoid the burnout and bureaucracy within the hospitals.
  - There are many health care professionals who could contribute much more than they are currently willing to.
  - There is little continuity in care because some medical professionals work two to three part-time jobs.
  - Nobody is more frustrated than health care providers when our most valued and costly resources are not being used efficiently.
• **Comments on the shortage of nurses:**
  - The media portray nurses in a disrespectful and inappropriate light. This makes it difficult to attract young people to a career in nursing.
  - Nurses are working more overtime than any other profession. They work such long hours that they cannot do their jobs properly.
  - Nurses are often too stressed and busy to be caring.
  - Nursing is now considered to be the most stressful occupation in Canada, based on sick time and Workers Compensation Board claims.
  - Nurses seem accustomed to apologizing for the deteriorated state of the hospitals and resigned to the idea that the system does not work and there is nothing they can do about it.
  - Nurses should be offered incentives to remain full-time on a specific ward. They should be shown that they are an important part of the health care system and ensured their voices are heard.
  - Nurses have little opportunity to take breaks from the stress and intensity of caring for high need patients and even less opportunity to provide patient education.

• **Comments on the outcomes of heavy workloads:**
  - There is little job satisfaction in medical professions due to heavy workloads.
  - Some health professionals leave the profession because they are burnt out and can no longer take pride in the quality of care they provide due to the strain they are under.
  - The workload in British Columbia is so high that many health professionals leave for other provinces.
  - Doctors have a poor quality of life due to heavy workloads and little leisure time.
  - The extreme stress on staff in emergency rooms is due to lack of support.
  - The short time practitioners spend with each patient limits their effectiveness and compromises patient care.
  - The critical work is demanding and emotionally and physically draining. There are times when the patient needs can drain the staff.
Ideas and Solutions

- We must ensure that nurses are not over-worked or have too many patients at one time.
- The stress load on physicians and nurses needs to be eased somehow.
- The safety issues for those working alone in community health centres need to be addressed.
- We require a system that directs our health care providers to areas of need.

Outstanding Questions

What are the dollar costs of excessive overtime and burnout to the system? Are these costs greater than those of providing benefits to extra nurses now working casual and on call, who would be happy to job-share?

Appreciation and Recognition

Comments and Concerns

- There is a lot of anger and frustration aimed towards medical professionals and British Columbia could lose valuable long-term employees if this persists.
- Nurses are not paid well and have to work long shifts; it is a thankless job.
- Health professionals are not feeling valued. They have no control over their work environment and their input is not heard or acted on.
- No one is rewarded for a job well done. There is little respect or recognition for staff from management or the government.
- Working in the medical field can be disheartening because the amount of people needing care seems endless.
- Depression rates among nurses and physicians are high.
- Medical professionals are abused by the public.
- With little time to complete tasks properly, lawsuits against medical professionals and hospitals have increased.
- Some nurses find their jobs to be rewarding and have long, diverse careers.
Outstanding Questions

• How can we engage and motivate medical professionals and make their work more interesting and rewarding?

Workplace Conditions

Comments and Concerns

• Hospital standards have deteriorated, and the level of professionalism has lessened. This has reduced the sense of pride medical professionals feel in the workplace.
• Some medical centers appear to be well run and happy places to work.
• Hospital administration has not been proactive in improving working conditions resulting in staff resignations and illness.
• People have been poorly managed which has undermined morale.
• The health authorities do not support or encourage healthy lifestyles for their employees.
• Nurses do not have enough job security or stability, and this is why there are few new nurses entering the system.
• The crowded hospital conditions are stressing staff and lowering job satisfaction.
• Too many beds have been closed, which has increased stress on doctors and nurses.
• Doctors are frustrated and being held back from fully treating their patients due to a lack of access to technology and facilities.
• Doctors and hospital staff are fed up and disheartened with emergency care.
• It is much more glamorous to work in the private sector where the pay is higher and clients are wealthier.

Ideas and Suggestions

• A new management plan should be implemented with an independent review. The people who work in the hospitals deserve this.
• More attention needs to be paid to encouraging healthy lifestyles for health professionals.
• There needs to be more childcare provided for those doing shift work.
Outstanding Questions

- What is needed to support the development and functioning of medical professionals and their workplace?

Culture Among Health Professionals

Comments and concerns

Communication
Collaboration between Health Professionals
Territorialism

- Comments on communication:
  - There is poor communication within Elder care facilities.
  - Poor communication may lead to duplicate testing.
  - Unclear lines of communication can lead to serious health issues with incidents like a doctor giving unclear pre-operational instructions.
  - General practitioners often send inadequate or insufficient patient information to the specialist. The specialist may not review the information thoroughly which can result in inadequate care.
  - There is an inconsistency between doctors that comes from miscommunication.
  - Practitioners are always in urgent mode which leads to poor relationships with their colleagues.
  - Pharmacists are starting to connect more with physicians and nurses.

- Comments on collaboration between health professionals:
  - There is little cooperation and coordination between hospital-based and clinic-based physicians.
  - The British Columbia Nurseline and emergency rooms lack collaboration.
  - Concern was raised over the amount of collaboration between physicians and the major pharmaceutical companies.
  - Health care professionals should not be ignorant of each others abilities. Doctors should admit when they are not knowledgeable in an area and offer to refer the patient to an alternative health practitioner if that would help.
Some doctors have been consulting with midwives to research ways to assist women to better prepare for birth.

Some doctors do not fully utilize allied health professionals services especially physiotherapy.

Patients are being required to speak with four, sometimes five different professionals.

Community health workers are not integrated by any means to other health care professionals.

There has been a loss of team atmosphere in hospitals.

Health professionals do not seem to realize they are all working for one organization and for the betterment of their patients.

Comments on territorialism:

Territorialism prevents multi-disciplinary interaction. Currently the system looks as follows:

a. Administration versus the health care employees;

b. Unions versus unions; and,

c. Registered Nurses versus Licensed Practical Nurses.

Competing disciplines may not want to work together.

Doctors may not want to give up any authority to Nurse Practitioners.

The current health culture consists of blame and a general lack of trust.

Research may not be openly shared between professionals even though it would benefit the patients.

There is no use of technology to transmit medical images between remote sites. Tests are being conducted in a redundant manner, because sharing data is not encouraged.

Inter-fighting drains the resources, energy and focus required for solution building.

Physicians do not want to step on their colleague’s toes and will concur with the first doctor’s diagnosis without doing their own tests.

The medical culture is burdened with rigid contracts.
Ideas and Suggestions

Communication
Collaboration between Health Professionals
Territorialism

• Ideas about communication:
  • There needs to be more communication and collaboration between:
    a. Physicians and specialists;
    b. Physicians and nurses;
    c. Physicians and patients;
    d. Physicians and pharmacists;
    e. Licensed Practical Nurses and Nurse Practitioners;
    f. Management and hospital employees; and,
    g. Physicians and emergency staff.
  • The work environment itself must be changed to facilitate better and easier communication between professionals.
  • Facilitate communication between associations and colleges to reduce future confrontation and territorialism.
  • Create opportunities for fellow practitioners to come together in dialogue without having to travel.
  • Facilitate communication by using teleconference technology as the cost of face to face consultation is very high.
  • Use hand-held communication devices to facilitate communication between team members.
  • Develop a common language between health professionals.

• Ideas about collaboration between health professionals
  • Teamwork should be a priority for every health care provider.
  • Physicians need to become part of the team, to work with other professions and with patients, so that they are not seen as these inapproachable experts, but rather as peers and colleagues and collaborators.
  • Together, chiropractors and physicians should provide comprehensive treatment options for their patients.
• The privacy act should be amended to make the transfer of patient information easier.

• Ideas about territorialism
  • End the turf wars between health professionals.
  • The general public, patients, physicians, medical support personnel, administrators, politicians, and the private sector must work together to eliminate the protectionism of health professionals. Cooperation and sustainability are an integral part of any working health care system.