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Health Evidence Network (HEN)

“How to create an attractive and supportive working environment for health professionals”

Key messages

Policy issue and context: poor work environments compromise healthworkforce supply and quality of care

- Health policy-makers face the challenge of matching increasing demand for health care with a sufficient supply of health professionals in times of existing and projected health-workforce shortages.
- The work environment constitutes an important factor in the recruitment and retention of health professionals, and the characteristics of the work environment affect the quality of care both directly and indirectly. Addressing the work environment, therefore, plays a critical role in ensuring both the supply of a health workforce and the enhancement, effectiveness and motivation of that workforce.
- The purpose of providing attractive and supportive work environments is to create incentives for entering – and remaining in – the health professions, and to provide conditions that enable health workers to perform effectively (to achieve high-quality health services).

Policy options

- Given the complexity of the work-environment issues to be addressed, policy responses need to be multidimensional, cross-cutting and inclusive. For coherent policies, policy action has to be considered at four levels: international/regional level; national level; sectoral level; and local/ organizational level. Effective solutions are context-related and therefore priority has to be given to the local and organizational level. The other levels provide the legislative and regulatory framework and provide guidance and support for the development of workplace policies.
- Two examples of what can be done to improve the quality of the work environment in the health professions include policy approaches to promote a healthy balance between family life and work, and the enhancement of the protection of workers' health.
- In order to encourage health-sector employers to make a commitment to positive work environments, the development of workplace assessment/recognition programmes could be considered.

Implementation considerations

- As many factors influencing the work environment operate outwith the health sector, intersectoral collaboration is required. In particular, the interface between labour and health-policy mandates needs to be strengthened.
- Here, the use of social dialogue can help to ensure sustainable and cross-sectional implementation with multiple stakeholders.

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