



Human Resource Management in Public Health Care: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Introduction: - HRM has been completely neglected in the health care, and its role is misinterpreted. For years, any scant attention given to HRM in the health care has focused only on personnel administrators rather than on managers; who are trained as HR professionals and those can contribute to achieving the goals of the national health plan. The absence of HR management capacity in the health care is a key factor standing between success and failure in Ethiopia's effort to alleviate its crushing burden of disease.

Objective:-Realizing the importance of HR managers in the health care in overcoming the HR crisis as well as the reality of the current situation—in which their role is not effectively developed or utilized. So this study discussed the role and experience of health professionals with significant responsibility for HRM, Identified the challenges that these health professionals are confronting and frame out additional skills and knowledge needed by these health professionals to address HRM challenges.

Methodology:-We used a cross-sectional study design. Data are being collected by using a survey instrument. The survey instrument for human resource managers was designed to capture adequate information on the background of human resource managers as well as their current challenges in training, skill sets, and needs etc.. The instrument contained open-ended and closed- ended questions.

Findings: - The study findings reveal a critical need for capacity building in human resource management in the health care. The respondents identified HR challenges in their organizations that severely limit their capacity to meet the health needs of their populations.

Keywords: - HRM, Health Care, Responsibility and Challenges.

1. Introduction

Developing capable, motivated and supported health workers is essential for overcoming bottle necks to achieve national and global health goals. At the heart of each and every health system, the work force is central to advancing health. Health reforms that aims at increasing efficiency, quality and users' satisfaction, needs to take into consideration human resource issues, because the health care is labor-intensive and the performance of health systems depends on qualified and motivated workers.

The dimensions of the human resource (HR) crisis in health have been reported in stark terms in publications and studies by the Joint Learning Initiative (JLI) (2005) and the World Health Organization (WHO) (2006), among others. Strategic HR leadership and management (managing people as strategic resources), however, pose a significant challenge because there is no trained, professional cadre of HR managers; HR management policies and practices are underdeveloped; and if developed, these policies and practices are not universally implemented, monitored, and evaluated (MSH 2003, 2004, and 2005).

At the same time, the support of the workforce is crucial to ensure successful implementation of reforms. As additional funds become available from various initiatives (e.g. Global Fund against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative and other processes), the ability to absorb them will be constrained without appropriate human resources.

A large majority of physicians held at least two jobs, one in the government and one in the private sector. Even with fragmented health systems, physicians could have three jobs: they worked part time for the social security institute, they worked for the ministry of health, and also held a private practice. Dual or triple employment generated conflicts of interests; physicians used the public sector to draw patients for their private practice, and their productivity in the public post was low and absenteeism high.

Bach, Brito et al., Dussault and Dubois, Rigoli and Dussault have identified human resources issues as the main obstacle for the success of the reforms. Historically, however, HRM has been badly neglected in the health sector, and its role is misunderstood. For years, any scant attention given to HRM in the health sector has focused on personnel administrators rather than on managers who are trained as HR professionals and can contribute to achieving the goals of the national health plan. The absence of HR management capacity in the health sector is a key factor standing between success and failure in Ethiopia's effort to alleviate its crushing burden of disease. Increasing the number of health workers, on its own, will not always improve health system performance or health outcomes. Scarce access to health care in rural areas, insufficient skills of health workers and inadequate support for

health personnel, low levels of motivation and performance, and chronic staff turnover are all well documented (JLI 2005). Improved HR management and leadership at the local, regional, and national levels can help address these challenges as well as support the recruitment and training of many more health workers. Rather than just assigning HRM to doctors or nurses with no preparation in HR management or to “personnel administrators” whose role is mainly to track personnel actions and look for irregularities, HR manager have to be trained to improve the performance of health staff, develop effective retention and other HR strategies and policies, and take a leadership role in creating a qualified, motivated workforce to improve health service delivery and health outcomes.

2. Objective of the Study

Recognizing the importance of HR managers in the health care in overcoming the HR crisis as well as the reality of the current situation—in which their role is not effectively developed or utilized—this study is designed to:

- Document the role of health professionals with significant responsibility for HRM.
- Identify the challenges that these health professionals face.
- Identify additional skills and knowledge needed by these health professionals to address HRM challenges.

3. Methodology

We used a cross-sectional study design to identify the challenges faced by staff with significant human resource management responsibilities and identify the skills needed to address these challenges. The target population in the study was the employees who are working in health care within the Tigray region in Ethiopia. The health care employees include various staff with different specialties and at different levels.

Data are being collected by using a survey instrument. The survey instrument for human resource managers was designed to capture adequate information on the background of human resource managers as well as their current challenges and training, skill sets, and needs. The instrument contained open-ended and closed-ended questions. The data collection process involved identifying participants, arranging meetings, and interviewing the approximately 60 informants. Purposive sampling was used to select the urban and rural offices and hospitals to participate in the study. In order to ensure equal representation and simplify data collection, all staff with substantive human resources responsibilities (defined as having at least one or more of the following responsibilities: HR planning and policy, benefits, deployment, training, supervision, performance appraisal, recruitment and administration) in the selected study sites were identified and interviewed. A total of 53 face-to-face interviews were conducted by the research teams. The first part of survey was completed individually by each respondent.

4. Study Finding

This section presents the personal background, work experience, current responsibilities, and challenges faced by the human resource managers. It also describes the HRM functions their organizations are responsible for and the skills and knowledge needed by respondents to carry out these functions.

4.1 Characteristics of Respondents (Table 1)

Sr. N.	Characteristics	No. of Respondents	
1	Gender	Male	52
		Female	8
2	Current Job Designation	Senior level Administration	14
		Middle level Administration	37
		Health Professional	9
3	Respondent's Department	Human Resource	9
		Health or Medical	30
		Administrative and finance	11
		Capacity building and training	7
		other	3

4	Professional Background	Nurse or Clinical officer	30
		Doctor	3
		Health administrative officer	9
		Other	18
5	Academic Qualification	Master's degree	9
		Bachelor's degree	32
		Diploma/certificate/ A level	19
6	Area of Study	Management	21
		Clinical studies training (e.g., medical, nursing)	21
		Social sciences	16
		Other	2

4.2 HRM function and Staff Responsibility

The respondents were asked to identify their current HR job responsibilities in the area of general administration, supervision, recruitment, performance appraisal, deployment, coordinating training, the provision of benefits, and human resource planning & policy (**Figure 1**).

The greater part of respondents reported administrative duties and recruitment of staff as job responsibilities. Supervision was also mentioned by more than half of respondents. Performance appraisal is mentioned only 23% and training as a function of the HR managers was mentioned by 47% of respondents. So it means they don't have set standard of criteria for selecting the employee for training and development.

Staff deployment was reported by 34% of respondents. This function is comprised of placement and transfer of staff in the health care. The benefits and HR planning & policy function was reported as 30%.

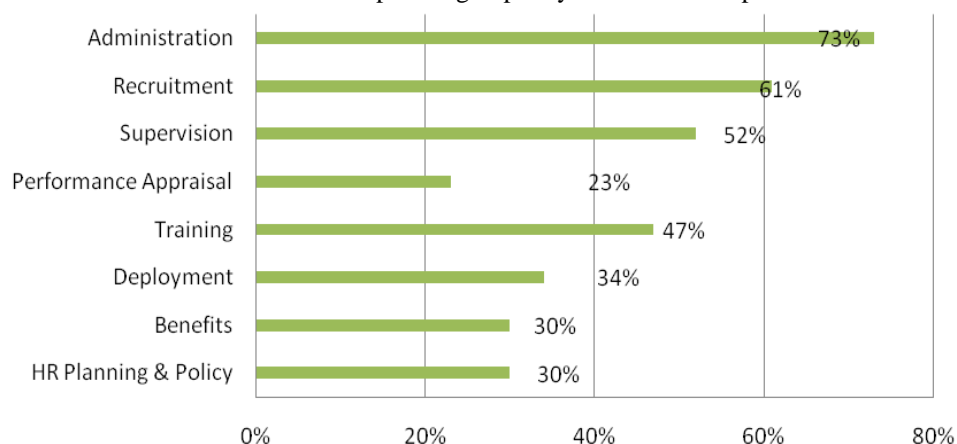


Figure 1. HR Function and Staff Responsibility

4.3 Human Resource Management Challenges

Respondents were asked to explain current HR management challenges in the health care sector. During this they gave more concern to understaffing, lack of staff satisfaction (e.g., dissatisfaction with benefits), lack of skilled staff, poor working conditions, and staff grievances (**Figure 2**).

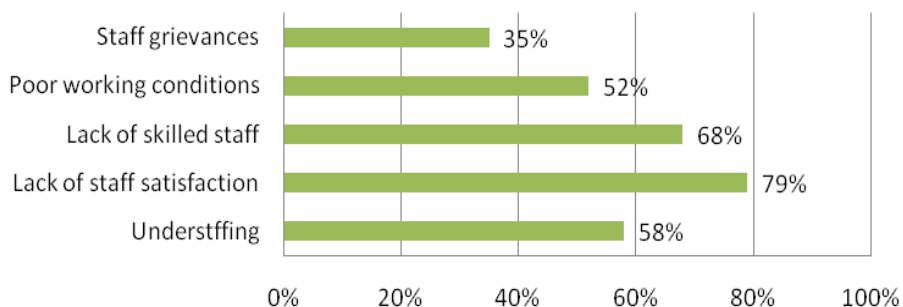


Figure 2. HRM Challenges Faced by Respondents

4.4 Skills and Knowledge HR Managers Need To Address HRM Challenges

The respondents were asked to indicate whether their organizations are responsible for specific functions in six critical components of human resource management: personnel policy, performance management, training, HR data systems, HR strategy development, and general leadership and management. Respondents were then asked if they felt they needed training themselves to carry out these functions. The findings for these six components are based on two dimensions: (1) organizational responsibility and (2) skills and knowledge needed by participants to carry out their HR responsibilities (**Figure-3**). Nearly all respondents indicated a need for additional preparation in all six components of HRM.

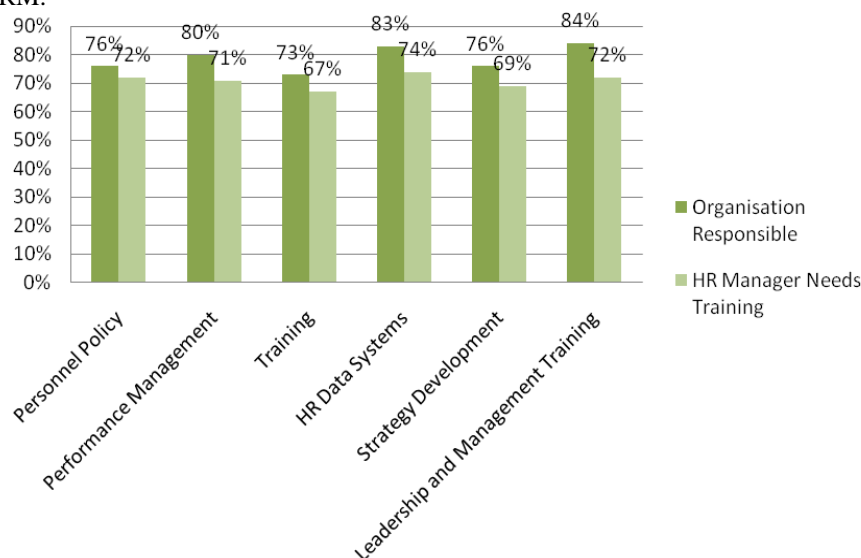


Figure 3. Gap analysis: Organization responsibility for HR functions versus respondents' need for training in these functions.

The majority of respondents indicated the need for training in all of the area. It shows that they are lacking in skill and knowledge. They need some special programme to enhance their performance in their functional areas.

5. Conclusions

Solving the problems that affect human resources management is not easy task. There is much more that needs to be done to improve the training and management of human resources for health care. The study findings indicate a critical need for capacity building in human resource management in the health sector. The respondents identified HR challenges in their organizations that severely limit their capacity to meet the health needs of their populations. In broad categories, these challenges are understaffing, lack of staff skills, lack of staff satisfaction, poor working conditions, and staff grievances. These are complex issues that, if neglected, contribute directly to lower standards of performance, increased staff turnover, and higher levels of staff vacancies. In a fully resourced system, professional HR managers would be trained and prepared to address these challenges

6. Recommendations

Study findings indicate that the most important priority is to create a stronger and more visible role for competent human resource management. A number of recommendations for accomplishing this goal emerged:

- Create a professional cadre of HR managers with responsibility for the welfare of the health staff, from recruitment, hiring, deployment, transfer, promotion, and development to resignation and/or dismissal.
- Provide in-service orientation and training on effective HR management practices to health managers at various levels who have some degree of HR responsibility.
- Review national-level HR policy to identify and address obstacles that inhibit effective and efficient HR management.
- Develop training programmes in HRM at local management schools. These training programmes should be at certificate, diploma, or degree level. The managers who participate should be supported to implement the skills learned.
- Review the pre-service and in-service training and provide courses on HRM, general management, and leadership.

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