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Sickness presenteeism among health care providers in an academic tertiary care center in Riyadh: A cross sectional survey

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Background: The term Sickness Presenteeism (SP) is described as the act of going to work even though judging that one's state of health is poor enough to justify sick leave. Working while sick not only puts the patient at risk but also decreases productivity and increases chances of medical errors. Moreover, SP is a risk factor for many negative health outcomes like depression, burn out and increased risk of serious cardiac events for the Health Care Providers (HCP) themselves. Furthermore, economic cost of SP is 4 times higher than absence due to sickness.

Aim: The aim of this study is to identify the reasons and prevalence of HCP who work while sick and their perception about its impact on patient safety.

Methods: A cross sectional study was conducted with 279 purposively selected healthcare professionals (doctors, nurses, dentist or pharmacists and other health care professionals) working at the Ministry of National Guards Health Affairs-King Abdulaziz Medical City.

Results: A total of 395 surveys were distributed; response rate was (70%). Mean age of the participants was 34.5±7.7 years. In this study, (63%) of the participants were nurses, (19%) physicians, (8%) pharmacists and (5%) were other healthcare providers. Nearly all of the participants (91%) believed that working while sick exposes patients to risk still the rate of SP in the past year was (74%); with one fourth of them reported working 3-4 times in past one year while being sick. More than half of them were not aware of existence of departmental policy about sick leave. Most common reason for working while sick was not to burden co-workers (71%), feeling of duty towards patients (67%), and for avoiding future workload due to absence (59%).

Conclusion: Sickness presenteeism is prevalent among three fourth of the HCPs. Unawareness about the existing rules and policies related to sick leave reported by more than half of the participants. Influence of predisposing and enabling factors were reported as precursors for SP i.e. practices observed by peers and the sympathies towards the coworkers with the thought of not wanting to overburden them determines the decision of whether to work or not during sickness.

Biography

Khalid Al Harbi is currently doing Internship at National Guard Hospital-Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. He has recently completed his PhD from King Saud bin Abdul-Aziz University for Health Sciences, KSA. He has published 3 papers in reputed journals.

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