

Letter to the Editor Regarding the Article: “Work-Family Balance Within the Medical Profession: An Exploratory Study”

Carta ao Editor Relativa ao Artigo “Conciliação Trabalho-Família na Profissão Médica: Um Estudo Exploratório”

Keywords: Family; Job Satisfaction; Physicians; Work-Life Balance; Work Schedule Tolerance; Workload

Palavras-chave: Conciliação Trabalho-Família; Excesso de Trabalho; Família; Médicos; Satisfação no Trabalho

Dear Editor,

I read with interest the article “Work-Family Balance within the Medical Profession: An Exploratory Study”¹ which assessed work-family balance within the medical profession in Portugal and offered a classification of work-family conciliation measures proposed in the questionnaire. The study addressed an interesting perspective of the correlations between the psychological contract of physicians (a concept in business management research, useful to be applied in modern medicine), and the satisfaction of their work-life balance.

The results seem to be the same as in Romania. In a survey evaluating the level of burnout among healthcare professionals, the author found a significant difference between the burnout level of doctors working in state hospitals compared with those employed in private hospitals.² This is due to the high workload, shortage of physicians, large number of patients doctors have to see each day, every day. As a retention strategy, in countries such as Romania with a high rate of emigration of physicians, healthcare organizations should apply interventions aimed at improving

physicians’ work-family balance.

Moreover, due to the growing prevalence of physical and emotional workload, medical students, residents and young doctors postpone marriage and parental status which leads to future work-family imbalance. A meta-analysis of medical students in the United States suggests that both physicians in training and practicing physicians experience high rates of burnout and low personal accomplishment as burnout contributing factor was found to be highly prevalent in a UK study.³ Developing resourcefulness to promote resilience in medical students, managing difficult circumstances, achieving work-life balance are important for successful clinical practice, but in the medical schools’ curriculum there are limited learning activities related to these issues.⁴ Academic medicine has been looking at ways to provide more comprehensive training by introducing new curricular areas dedicated to the development of future doctors’ resilience and resourcefulness.⁴

Work-family reconciliation of doctors deserves greater attention from public and private health institutions.⁵ Environmental requirements of modern medicine involve recognizing the need for a change of the psychological contract, the unwritten agreement between medical institutions and doctors, proposing more beneficial arrangements for both parties. Transition from a psychological contract of physicians, focused on relational exchange based on trust, loyalty for both their patients and healthcare institutions, to a negotiable and flexible agreement, should be considered in today’s demanding healthcare systems.

Since interventions that increase adherence to the psychological contract positively affect the work-life balance, managers of private, and public health organizations in particular, should be aware of the need for this change and invest in measures such as those assessed by doctors in Portugal.

REFERENCES

1. Afonso P, Aleixo OV, Aleixo RV, Carvalho DJ, Simões JA. Work-family balance within the medical profession: an exploratory study. *Acta Med Port.* 2019;32:697-705.
2. Makkai K. Evaluating the level of burnout among healthcare professionals. *Acta Univ Sapientiae Soc Anal.* 2018;8:23-39.
3. Imo UO. Burnout and psychiatric morbidity among doctors in the UK: a systematic literature review of prevalence and associated factors. *BJPsych Bull.* 2017;41:197-204.
4. Wright B, Richmond Mynett J. Training medical students to manage difficult circumstances- a curriculum for resilience and resourcefulness? *BMC Med Educ.* 2019;19:280.
5. Afonso P. Work-family conflict in the medical profession. *Acta Med Port.* 2018;31:796.

Mira FLOREA✉¹

1. University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Iuliu Hatieganu”. Cluj-Napoca. Romania.

Autor correspondente: Mira Florea. miraflorea17@gmail.com

Recebido: 01 de dezembro de 2019 - Aceite: 02 de dezembro de 2019 | Copyright © Ordem dos Médicos 2020

<https://doi.org/10.20344/amp.13213>

