THE IMPACT OF GENERATION Y PHYSIOTHERAPISTS IN THE WORKFORCE: A STUDY OF CURTIN PHYSIOTHERAPY GRADUATES 2000-2004

Mulcahy, Amanda1,3 Jones, Sue1 Strauss, Geoff2 Cooper, Ian1

School of Physiotherapy1, and Faculty of Teaching and Learning2, Curtin University of Technology, Western Australia; Department of Physiotherapy, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, Western Australia1

INTRODUCTION

Within healthcare, multidisciplinary models continue to grow. They rely on a sufficient workforce in all professions to ensure effective management of medical practitioner’s patients. Physiotherapy is the largest contributor to healthcare after nursing and medicine1, therefore it is important to understand the dynamic employment characteristics of the profession.

Few recent studies have examined the extent to which health professionals may become dissatisfied and leave their professions, and much evidence is anecdotal1-4. As Australia continues to experience a shortage of many healthcare workers including physiotherapists,5 factors influencing professional satisfaction levels need to be identified and managed appropriately.

With retirement and employment growth, Generation Y as a whole is predicted to occupy 40% of the general labour force within five years. They have enormous potential to influence employment trends.

OBJECTIVES

- Explore the workforce trends for recent physiotherapy graduates
- Establish satisfaction levels and motivating factors for employment
- Determine graduates’ future career intentions and how many remain in the physiotherapy profession up to five years after graduation
- Discuss the implications of the above for the physiotherapy profession and wider health workforce

DESIGN, SETTING, PARTICIPANTS

- Study conducted in Perth, Western Australia
- Self-administered questionnaire sent to 407 contactable graduates from Curtin University of Technology’s School of Physiotherapy Graduates 2000-2004 (of 436 total graduates)
- Response rate achieved = 63%
- Descriptive statistics, chi square and qualitative text analysis utilised in analysing results

RESULTS

PROFILE OF A RECENT PHYSIOTHERAPY GRADUATE

- 68% female
- Mean age 28 years ±3.9; range 23-43 years
- Majority age in major Australian cities (8% rural Australia, 13% overseas)
- 76% work full-time with average 39 hours worked per week
- 92% working as clinicians
- 55% working in private sector; 45% public sector
- 62% spending some time in Musculoskeletal physiotherapy
- 50% Australian Physiotherapy Association members
- 45% completed 10-50 hours of professional development in 2006
- 31% undertaking or completed Post Graduate study

FUTURE WORKFORCE PREDICTORS

- 15% inactive in physiotherapy (unemployed, working in another profession, studying full-time, on extended leave)
- 25% believed they would be in the physiotherapy profession for 20+ years, whilst 65% believed they would leave the profession within 10 years
- Most likely reason for leaving the workforce
  - Family commitments (27%)
  - Change of career (25%)
  - Retirement from work (10%)

Who was significantly more satisfied with work as a physiotherapist? (p < 0.05)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Type</th>
<th>% satisfied</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working rurally</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Physiotherapy Association members</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;100 hrs Professional Development in 2006</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors in public sector</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals in private sector</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which physiotherapists earned significantly greater salaries? (p<0.05)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salary pa ($AUD)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working rurally</td>
<td>&gt;$56K</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>&gt;$57K</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Sector</td>
<td>&gt;$57K</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals in Private Sector</td>
<td>&gt;$65K</td>
<td>85</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seniors in Public Sector</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;100 hrs Professional Development in 2006</td>
<td>&gt;$75K</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSIONS

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

- Sample limited to Curtin University School of Physiotherapy Graduates - Further similar studies could be conducted with wider age groups; state-wide; nation-wide; in other health professions.
- The response rate achieved was above accepted thresholds for self-administered questionnaires4-5, and was higher than previous physiotherapy workforce studies1-3.
- Only 10% respondents were born before 1975 (falling outside the Generation Y age group). They were not excluded from the study as they were still considered ‘Generation Y trained’ physiotherapists.

CONCLUSION

- A quarter of respondents indicated a long-term career in physiotherapy. Given current healthcare shortages, data such as this has massive implications for the future workforce.
- The most satisfied recent physiotherapy graduates had defined a career path by achieving senior status, and took a greater active interest in the profession undertaking more professional development and holding professional association membership. Physiotherapists also demanded workplace flexibility, rewards (both extrinsic and intrinsic), recognition for skills and a structured, achievable career path.
- This study highlights issues to be considered by health employers, managers, educators and government bodies to recruit and retain Generation Y health employees in the workforce.

REFERENCES


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