

Foreign Healthcare Workers' Psychological Contract Maintenance Experience and Its Implications for China

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Abstract: This paper evaluates the advanced experience of psychological contract management in foreign hospitals from four aspects: building mutual relationships, establishing incentive mechanisms, developing hospital culture, and creating a positive work environment. It identifies problems and shortcomings in the reform process of Chinese public hospitals, such as unmet development and promotion needs of healthcare workers, an unsatisfactory overall professional environment, and a mismatch between workload and compensation/benefits. Corresponding improvement measures for the psychological contract are proposed, providing a reference for stabilizing talent and enhancing cohesion in China's public hospitals.

Keywords: Psychological contract; Healthcare workers; Hospital management

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1. Introduction

A psychological contract refers to an individual's subjective perception of the mutually beneficial relationship with their organization. For clinical medical staff, it is their belief that their efforts will be rewarded by the hospital^[1]. Psychological contract breach arises when the organization fails to fulfill obligations, stemming from the individual's comparison between actual and promised results^[2]. Fulfilling psychological contracts boosts staff satisfaction, organizational trust, and work engagement while reducing turnover intention^[3,4], breach may trigger negative behaviors like work withdrawal^[5]. This paper draws on foreign experiences to inform positive psychological contract building in Chinese hospitals.

2. Existing issues with the psychological contract of domestic medical staff

2.1. Difficulty in meeting development and promotion needs

Under the current system, young medical staff in public hospitals face a long training cycle, high work

requirements, and heavy pressure, yet receive relatively low compensation. With the advancement of healthcare reform, the rise of private and foreign-funded hospitals has led to a high turnover rate among young medical staff. From the perspective of the psychological contract, if medical staff with strong self-development needs cannot fully align their personal development with the hospital's development, and their psychological expectations remain unmet, the psychological contract will be damaged.

2.2. Poor overall professional environment

Most domestic hospital administrators often lack flexible management skills when addressing issues and disregard the psychological feelings of frontline staff. Some leaders even feel jealous of subordinates with strong work capabilities and may intentionally suppress young medical staff who possess professional skills, innovative ideas, and work enthusiasm, hindering their career development ^[6,7].

2.3. Mismatch between work intensity and compensation & benefits

Clinical work is characterized by a fast pace and high intensity. Medical staff have irregular rest schedules due to shift work, and they often sacrifice rest time to participate in training for professional development. However, the actual benefits they receive are not proportional to their contributions, which in turn leads to the violation of the psychological contract ^[5].

3. Insights from foreign experience for China

3.1. Establishing mutually committed relationships to improve contract fulfillment

Examples of human resource management in foreign enterprises show that enterprises and employees tend to pursue a win-win cooperative relationship where they “share weal and woe” ^[8]. A survey in Japan revealed that many doctors leave hospitals due to poor working conditions ^[9]. Given that medical staff bear significant responsibilities to hospitals and face high expectations from both hospitals and the public, administrators need to establish a communication platform for the psychological contract, allowing medical staff to communicate freely ^[10]. At the same time, healthcare policymakers should take comprehensive and decisive measures to improve working conditions and alleviate the overwork of medical staff. Involve staff in management/decision-making, solicit opinions to enhance belonging ^[11].

3.2. Utilizing incentive methods to enhance hospital cohesion

It is necessary to improve the incentive mechanism and build an incentive-oriented contractual relationship, thereby retaining talents and promoting hospital development. Hospitals in Singapore set up various awards and provide material and spiritual rewards to outstanding medical staff in stages ^[12]; The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) in the United States incorporates performance evaluation into hospital assessments, emphasizes the evaluation of hospital management elements to improve service quality, and links performance to management as well as personal contributions to compensation ^[13]. This not only strengthens the sense of responsibility of medical staff but also enhances their work enthusiasm ^[14].

3.3. Strengthening hospital culture construction to improve core competitiveness

Foreign literature indicates that there is a positive correlation between hospital culture and the psychological contract of clinical doctors ^[15]. Therefore, hospital culture can be used to enhance the level of the psychological

contract among medical staff. Hospitals in Singapore build their culture from two aspects: hardware (distinctive architecture, environment, and equipment) and software (professional image, services, legal management, and psychological counseling), so as to strengthen employees' sense of identification and belonging^[12]. Domestic hospitals can narrow interpersonal distances and improve employees' professional quality by organizing cultural and sports activities

3.4. Creating a harmonious work environment and focusing on physical and mental development

Studies have pointed out that excessive workload, poor working environment, and heavy emotional demands can lead to professional burnout among medical staff^[16–18]. To alleviate this situation, it is necessary to improve the work environment and provide psychological support to reduce their psychological burden. Hospitals in Singapore build various cultural activity venues and organize medical staff to participate in recreational activities to meet their entertainment needs^[19]. Senior management of Japanese hospitals regularly discuss management issues, encourage employees to put forward suggestions, and conduct regular employee satisfaction surveys^[20]. Reasonable suggestions are discussed and praised, which not only optimizes hospital operations but also cultivates employees' sense of ownership. Domestic hospitals can organize activities through trade unions to create a comfortable work atmosphere and eliminate employees' negative emotions.

4. Conclusion

This article analyzes three major issues regarding the psychological contract of domestic medical staff and, drawing on foreign experience, provides insights for China from four aspects: establishing mutually committed relationships, utilizing incentives effectively, strengthening cultural construction, and creating a harmonious environment.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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