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Exploring Barriers and Opportunities for Effective Leadership in Addressing Healthcare Workforce Retention and Recruitment in Tyrol, Austria

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the critical challenges faced by the healthcare sector worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there will be a worldwide shortage of 10 million health workers by 2030, which will have a negative impact on the population's health and hinder the goal of universal health coverage. Austria projects a shortfall of 76,000 care workers by 2030. Addressing this requires exploring how to effectively recruit and retain healthcare staff. As new generations join the healthcare sector and face evolving work methods and challenges, understanding these dynamics is crucial for ensuring a sustainable and high-quality health system.

Methods

A total of 124 individuals from a diverse range of advocacy groups, nurses, doctors, and managers within the health and social sector in Tyrol were interviewed in 2022 about the corporate culture. The interviews were conducted using a problem-centered approach, and the data was analyzed using inductive content analysis.

Results

The interviews revealed several issues, including a pronounced hierarchy in nursing and a lack of appreciation evident in communication, collaboration, and interprofessional relationships. Dissatisfaction with salaries is rarely at the top of the list, but criticism of poor working conditions, unreliable rosters and non-transparent or poorly organized processes and procedures is high. Flexibility is understood in two dimensions, as something that affects employers and employees alike. Furthermore, the nursing staff perceive themselves as being able to attain more extensive competencies, which, on the one hand, would result in greater recognition, and on the other hand, would facilitate more efficient care. Additionally, the public image of professions in the healthcare sector is also viewed with ambivalence. Admittedly, there are challenges, nevertheless, the negative image does not help to inspire more young people to take up professions in the healthcare sector.

Conclusion

In order to improve job satisfaction and retain healthcare professionals, it is necessary to transition towards shared decision-making, implement a flatter organizational structure, foster an inclusive work environment with a robust feedback culture, provide individual flexibility in working hours and contracts, offer training and educational opportunities, and empower nurses with greater responsibility and autonomy.