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RESEARCH

Exploring pharmacists' perceived job alternatives: Results from the 2014 National Pharmacist Workforce Survey

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To examine the association between pharmacists' demographics, practice variables, worklife attitudes (e.g., work environment stress, control in the work environment, professional commitment, work-home conflict, and organizational commitment), and their perceived job alternatives.

Design: Cross-sectional descriptive study.

Setting: A representative nationwide sample of licensed pharmacists in the United States, 2014.

Participants: A total of 1574 practicing pharmacists.

Main outcome measures: A previously validated Likert-type scale was used to measure perceived job alternatives. Pharmacists reported their perception on how easy it would be to find a better job with the use of 17 common organizational characteristics. The higher the score, the easier they perceived it would be to find a new job.

Results: The perceived job alternatives scale manifested 4 constructs: environmental conditions, professional opportunities, compensation, and coworkers. Multivariate regression analysis showed that organizational commitment was the most influential worklife attitude and was negatively associated with all constructs except better compensation. The higher professional commitment and environmental stress, the easier pharmacists perceived it would be to find a new job with better environmental conditions, such as better professional treatment by management. Younger pharmacists indicated higher perceived levels of ease in finding a job with better environmental conditions and professional opportunities. Male pharmacists also reported a higher perceived level of ease in finding an alternate job with better professional opportunities. White pharmacists perceived it would be easier to find a new job with better environmental aspects and compensation. No statistical significance was observed in perceived job alternatives among pharmacists practicing in different primary work settings after adjusting for other variables.

Conclusion: Demographics and worklife attitudes were found to affect perceived availability of job alternatives. Organizational commitment was the most important factor inversely associated with pharmacists' perceptions of better job alternatives. Employers may retain pharmacists by constantly maintaining pharmacists' sense of belonging to their organizations.

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"Perceived job alternatives" is defined as the perceived ease of moving between employers.¹ This means that the more job availability outside the organization people think they have, the greater the perceived ease in finding another job.² Perceived job alternatives is not only a predictor of actual job turnover but also contributes to an individual's turnover intention (the likelihood that individual would think about voluntarily leaving their position).³ According to a meta-analysis of 23 studies on predictors of employee turnover, employees' perception of available job alternatives positively predicts actual turnover of employees from various

Key Points

Background:

- Previous studies have focused on pharmacists' worklife attitudes and their associations with pharmacists' demographic and practice characteristics, but current literature has shed little light on how perceived job alternatives of pharmacists are associated with demographics and practice variables.
- The perception of alternate job availability potentially predicts both job turnover and turnover intentions, and pharmacists leaving their jobs may have a positive or negative impact on the pharmacy sector. This study presents comprehensive evidence on perceived job alternatives from the use of a national pharmacist workforce survey.

Findings:

- The research revealed 4 dimensions related to perceived job alternatives: environmental conditions, professional opportunities, compensation, and coworkers. The results show that there are statistically significant differences in the level of ease in finding a better job among pharmacists' demographic characteristics.
- Pharmacists who are committed to their current organization perceive that it would be difficult to find a better job than their present one. Employers may retain pharmacists in their current position by forming pharmacists' emotional attachment (i.e., strengthening interpersonal relationships and pharmacists' sense of belonging) to the organization.
- Although pharmacist retention could reduce turnover costs, changes in employment among pharmacists could also encourage innovation in the new workplace.
- Pharmacists experiencing higher environmental stress from their current setting indicated a higher level of perceived ease in finding an alternate job with better environmental conditions. However, this finding is not compatible with previous research. One explanation for the contradictory result is that pharmacists' workload has increased during the past decade as their roles in health care have rapidly evolved.
- Employers could help to manage simultaneously the workload and environmental stress among their employees so that pharmacists will become more satisfied with and committed to their current professional position.

As suggested by Griffeth et al.,⁴ pharmacists with a higher level of ease in finding an alternate job are more likely to leave their organization. Previous research has indicated that job turnover has both positive and negative consequences.⁷ On one hand, job turnover may have a beneficial influence on both employees and a new workplace. The newcomers may have more opportunities for career growth in the new setting, including professional skill acquisition, career goal realization, promotion, and salary increases.^{8,9} The new employer may benefit from fresh perspectives, new experiences, and innovative ideas that new employees bring with them.⁷ On the other hand, job turnover of health care providers can be costly to the organization¹⁰ and has unavoidable negative consequences on quality of health care.¹¹ For instance, higher rates of turnover among primary care providers in managed care organizations were associated with decreasing care quality.¹² McCullough et al.¹³ disclosed that familiarity and trust between pharmacists and patients develop over time and that high rates of pharmacist job turnover may undermine continuity of patient care. Therefore, knowledge of perceived job alternatives may help organizations to determine optimal pharmacist turnover rates and maintain pharmacist-patient relationships.

Past studies^{14–17} have highlighted that pharmacists' worklife attitudes, especially job satisfaction, are associated with demographic factors and pharmacists' practice characteristics. For example, Mott et al.¹⁶ revealed that female pharmacists indicated lower role conflict and higher job satisfaction than male pharmacists. Seston et al.¹⁵ also found that female pharmacists had significantly higher levels of overall job satisfaction compared with male pharmacists. Despite these published studies, perceived job alternatives of pharmacists with different demographics and practice environments have not been well addressed. The association between perceived employment alternatives and other pharmacists' worklife attitudes should also be examined to expand our knowledge about pharmacists' propensity to leave their current job. Although better understanding of perceived job alternatives may substantially impact patient care, to date very few studies of that construct have been conducted among pharmacists. A study by Gaither et al.¹⁸ examined the effects of perceived job alternatives among pharmacists across the United States on various worklife factors: work-home conflict, job stress, career commitment, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job turnover intention. The study found that how pharmacists perceive the ease in finding a better alternative job is associated with these worklife attitudes. However, data used in that study were collected in 2000, and with the ever-changing face of the pharmacy profession, the results may not apply to pharmacists at present. Therefore, an up-to-date study was needed to identify current perceived job alternatives.

Objectives

It is crucial to assess how easy pharmacists perceive switching jobs because their perceptions may play a role in determining the turnover rate of pharmacists. Greater understanding of how pharmacists' characteristics are associated with perceived job alternatives would enable the pharmacy

professions.⁴ For example, among infection control nurses, perceived availability of job alternatives, along with nurses' characteristics, is a predictor of turnover intention.⁵ Perceived job alternatives regarding the turnover intention of information technology professionals is affected by job-related and perceived organizational factors.⁶

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