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Pharmacists' satisfaction with their work: Analysis of an alumni survey

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ABSTRACT

Background: The level of job satisfaction among practicing pharmacists is important because it has been found to affect job performance and employee turnover. The Swedish pharmacy market has undergone major changes in recent years, and little is known about pharmacists' job satisfaction.

Objectives: The objective of this study was to investigate the level of job satisfaction and associated factors among graduates from the web-based pharmacy programs at Umeå University.

Methods: Job satisfaction of pharmacists was measured as part of an alumni survey conducted with those who graduated from the pharmacy programmes between 2006 and 2014. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, and logistic regression was used to explore factors affecting job satisfaction.

Results: The total number of graduates who completed the survey was 222 (response rate 43%). The majority of respondents were female (95%), and most were employed at a community pharmacy (85%). The mean age was 39.7 years. The majority of graduates (91%) were satisfied with their job "most of the time" or "all of the time", and 87% of the respondents would "definitely" or "maybe" choose the same career again. The multivariate analysis showed that increasing years in the current position (OR: 0.672 (0.519–0.871)) was associated with lower job satisfaction. Older age (OR: 1.123 (1.022–1.234)), the perception that the knowledge and skills acquired during university education is useful in the current job (OR: 4.643 (1.255–17.182)) and access to continuing professional development (OR: 9.472 (1.965–45.662)) were associated with higher job satisfaction.

Conclusion: Most graduates from the web-based pharmacy programmes were satisfied with their current job. Access to continuing professional development seems to be important for the level of job satisfaction among pharmacists.

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1. Introduction

Pharmacists' job satisfaction has been of interest for many years and is of great importance in several aspects. Job satisfaction has implications for employee turnover and commitment, and it plays an important role in pharmacists' decisions to leave the profession.¹ Further, poor job satisfaction has been associated with poor job performance, especially for professionals like pharmacists,² and this might in turn affect patient care. Decreased interactions between patients and pharmacists³ or dispensing errors are possible consequences of poor job performance, which might increase the risk of patient harm.⁴ Job satisfaction is also important for the

individual because it has been shown to affect well-being in other aspects of life.^{5,6}

Previous research to identify factors associated with pharmacists' job satisfaction has been performed mostly in the US and the UK. McCann et al. found that job satisfaction in Northern Ireland varied depending on roles and responsibilities,⁷ and a higher degree of autonomy has been associated with job satisfaction among pharmacists.^{8,9} A study from the US found that job satisfaction might increase when pharmacists enrol in continuing professional development (CPD) programs and/or precept students.¹⁰ Female gender¹¹ as well as older age have also been positively associated with job satisfaction.¹² Furthermore, community pharmacists have been found to be less satisfied compared to pharmacists working in other sectors,¹¹ and high levels of job satisfaction have been found among those working part-time.¹²

Up until 2009, the Swedish pharmacy market was entirely state-owned, including both community and hospital pharmacies. In

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2009 the pharmacy market in Sweden was re-regulated.^{13–15} The market, which had only a single government-owned company for 40 years (Apoteket AB), was replaced by privately owned pharmacies. As a result of rapid market growth and high degree of competition, pharmacists experienced new challenges and tasks such as new prescription dispensing systems,¹⁶ low availability of medicines, and different business models.^{13,15} These changes may affect job satisfaction in a negative way, especially among community pharmacists. In light of the new pharmacy market, this study aimed to investigate the level of job satisfaction and factors associated with job satisfaction among graduates from the web-based pharmacy programmes at Umeå University in Sweden.

2. Method

2.1. Setting

In 2015, a survey was distributed to all students who graduated from the web-based Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy programme (a three year web-based program) and/or Master of Pharmaceutical Science programme (a two year web-based program) between 2006 and 2014 ($n = 511$). In Scandinavia, bachelor graduates are called prescriptionists and graduates from the master program are called pharmacists. For simplicity, the term pharmacist is used in this paper to describe both prescriptionists and pharmacists. Most of the teaching occurs online using a virtual learning environment – containing recorded lectures, text material, animations, and assignments – and a communication software (Adobe Connect). Some mandatory meetings occur on campus (approximately 2–4 times each semester) and include laboratory work, oral presentations, and role plays.

2.2. Survey instrument

The questionnaire was developed using information from the literature^{7,17} as well as general alumni surveys from other departments within the university. The data used in this study contained information about the characteristics of the graduates' work setting, workload, present duties, and time in their current position. Those who reported working in a community pharmacy were asked questions about their position (employee or manager), number of pharmacists employed, and employer. There were five questions about job satisfaction measured using a five-item validated version of the satisfaction survey from McCann et al.⁷ This was translated into Swedish then back translated into English and pilot tested. Graduates were also asked about their opportunities for CPD and if the knowledge and skills they acquired during their training were useful in their current job. Furthermore, the graduates were asked to provide demographic information, which included, for example, sex, date of birth, country of birth, and individual gross income.

2.3. Pilot testing

Three graduates from the pharmacy programmes reviewed the questionnaire. The graduates were advised that the purpose of the pilot-test was to improve the questionnaire and were asked to critically evaluate it to ensure the clarity of the statements. Minor changes were made to the format as a result of this pilot testing.

2.4. Survey administration

A paper copy of the questionnaire was posted in the beginning of May 2015 to all graduates who had a Swedish address in the university's administrative register ($n = 437$). The administrative

department printed the address labels, and a research assistant posted the surveys. Graduates were given a postage-paid reply envelope to return the survey, and the paper copy also had a link to an online version (identical to the paper version) hosted by Survey Monkey[®]. The graduates could choose if they wanted to return the survey by post or by completing the online version. An invitation to participate in the online version of the survey was sent by email to graduates with no Swedish address registered ($n = 74$). The link to the online version was active for two months until the end of June 2015. No reminders were sent, and participants were not remunerated for their participation.

2.5. Data analysis

Data collected via the paper questionnaires were entered into Survey Monkey[®], the same online platform used for the online version of the survey. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data. Simple logistic regression analyses were conducted to investigate the association between job satisfaction and the factors of age, sex, employee category, employment status, current employment, years in current position, income, graduation degree, years since graduation, year of graduation (2006–2009 or 2010–2014), access to CPD, and if the knowledge and skills they acquired during their training are useful in their current job. In the model, job satisfaction was measured with the question "All things considered, how often are you satisfied with your job?" and the answers were dichotomized into "not satisfied" (those who responded "never or rarely" and "sometimes satisfied") and "satisfied" (those who responded "satisfied most of the time" and "satisfied all of the time"). To analyse any differences in job satisfaction among those who graduated before and after the re-regulation, year of graduation was dichotomized into 2006–2009 and 2010–2014. The answers to the question about access to CPD were dichotomized into "limited" ("limited" and "very limited") and "good" ("satisfactory", "good", and "very good"). The answers to the question "The knowledge and skills you acquired during your training are useful in your current job" were dichotomized into "disagree" (1–3 points) and "agree" (4–5 points). A multiple logistic regression analysis was conducted including significant variables from the simple models, and these also included age and sex. Results are presented as odds ratios (ORs) with 95% confidence intervals (CIs). The significance level for all statistical tests was set at 5%. All analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows version 23.0.

2.6. Ethics

No ethical committee approval was sought prior to beginning this research because it is not mandatory under Swedish law for this type of study. Nonetheless, all respondents were provided information about the aim of the study and were advised that data would be treated as strictly confidential and that all the information would be de-identified.

3. Results

The total number of people who completed the survey was 222, giving a response rate of 43%. All responses were included in the analysis of the results. The characteristics of the respondents are shown in [Table 1](#). The majority of respondents were female (95%) and had graduated from the bachelor program. The mean age was 39.7 years. Most respondents were full-time employed (71%) and worked as community pharmacists (85%). The vast majority were living in Sweden (92%), and 17 of the graduates (8%) were living in Norway when the survey was distributed.

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