

## **Care Professions - working conditions in the life course**

### **Demographic and labor market development of Nursing and Care Professions**

Demography and "aging society", have a significant impact on labor market and employment: According to forecasts by the Federal Statistical Office, the number of people needing care will double by 2050 to 4.5 million. Evaluating such 'status quo' forecasts it should be recognized that the care needs can change by many factors. There can also be a reduced need by advances in health care and health oriented life style. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the already existing shortage in care services will continue to rise. This applies to hospitals, nursing homes and outpatient services alike.

For the nurses themselves, there is a cumulative effect. On the one hand, the need for their services will increase; on the other hand they are themselves subject to the demographically aging process. While the under 35-year-old professionals have declined by 15 percent in the last decade, the number of the 50-year-olds has doubled. In addition fiscal and economic policies are constantly limiting the supply in personal capacity for the nursing and care professions. All this contributes to high pressures of working load and working conditions for these professions. More than 80 percent of them are women, who often bear the double burden of their care profession and family duties. As a result, both the absenteeism because of sickness and personal turnover are exceptionally high.

Scientific studies show that very few workers in these occupations can imagine to stay in their jobs until the statutory retirement (65 years and additional months till the retirement age with 67 is reached in 2029). Among all workers in the health and care sector, only a 50% - for the staff in old age care only 25 %- can imagine to stay in their jobs till retirement age. Amongst premature retirement because of sickness the nursing staff is at the top, whereby psychological factors play a disproportionately important role. This is disproportionately high for the personnel in the lower qualified assistant jobs. They have to bear the physically more demanding jobs. In addition the low professional opportunities play a crucial role in psychological deficiencies. This is particularly important because respect and recognition of the difficult and demanding work of care professions could be an important compensation for the demanding working conditions and also for the quality of care.

In order to attract both new employees as well as to improve the employment duration and stability, comprehensive concepts of social and labor market policies are required. However, here are significant gaps already in the analysis of working conditions and even more in age- or life cycle orientation of work. Therefore further research is urgently needed. For the HdBA as an application-oriented university of specialists and junior executives for the Federal Employment Agency, the European and international information and experience is becoming increasingly important. For research, teaching and practice in these nursing and care professions benchmarking in the EU could be extremely helpful for filling those gaps.

In order to provide scientific input I can report about the results of a research seminar at Alice Salomon Hochschule for Health and Care in Berlin, which I guided myself. In addition I did use for my preparation of lecturing at your University the research of

Prof. Dr. Hildegard Theobald of the University of Vechta. She did empirical research comparing working conditions for nursing and care professions in Germany and Sweden for the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung.

## **Research in Working Conditions of the Alice Salomon Hochschule, Berlin**

The Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences Berlin did carry out a three-semester research seminar from 2011 and 2012 on "age oriented personnel management". Involved were eleven students of Bachelor training in health and care management, continuing to work part-time as trained nurses. Many of them have at the same time to take responsibility for their families and children. These students conducted five sub-projects:

- Job satisfaction and employment stability of nurses;
- The age oriented personnel management;
- Age discrimination in the workplace;
- Burnout in nursing professions;.
- "Human Development 50+" experience of students at Alice Salomon University.

As expected, the results unanimously underlined the ancient social pattern of devaluating workers in higher age brackets. The deficits are put in focus, while skills which increase with age, are neglected.

The analyzes show that at the middle management level there is an awareness of the challenges of an appropriate human resource management in respect to the aging workers. However, this is not transformed into concrete policies and measures. The same is true for the study programs at the University. The basic awareness about the challenges of an aging oriented human resource management in the health care sector is not followed by concrete knowledge about solutions provided to the students.

As a result of this lack of "theory-practice transfer" in personnel management the employees experienced mentally and physically heavy workloads. There was not only a lack of sufficient protective measures but also of any systematic prevention. Younger employees are apparently better equipped to compensate for this. For the elderly, the heavy work load caused conflicts – between the different hierarchy levels but also between young and old. High work pressures did promote the spiral of deficits and discrimination for the elderly; reduction of performance and increase of sickness.

A key outcome of the project is that employees regardless of age suffer from lacking recognition of their professional care work - in working life as well as in society at large. This seems to be more important in the evaluation of the workers concerned than their complaints about insufficient wages. In addition the nursing and care workers complain about not being able to fulfill their job responsibilities according to their own standards. This did prove to be one of the main stress factors.

## **Conclusions**

Care workers have often deliberately chosen their profession. They are committed and willing to take a lot of effort and disadvantages connected with these work responsibilities. This applies regardless of age and or generation concerned. A culture of recognition and appreciation for the work of nursing and care workers must therefore be an essential part of any concept of personnel management.. This

includes the communication and participation "on an equal footing" between the various levels of tasks and hierarchies.

Other concrete solutions are the need for systematic "theory-practice transfer" for age- and life cycle designed work conditions - including fair wages. Equally necessary is obviously a systematic, transparent and fair conflict management. Both the culture of recognition and the specific measures of aging-appropriate personnel policy must be initiated by the middle management and supported as well as assisted by the top management with adequate financial and human resources. Initiatives must be taken and enforced by the unions and employee representatives by the respective collective bargaining and collective agreements. This has to be supported by adequate social and labor market policies and regulation.

Care workers and New Public Management: A comparison of long-term care reforms and their effects on care workers in Sweden and Germany

This is representing the results of research by Prof. Dr. Hildegard Theobald, University of Vechta and Prof. Marta Szebehely, University of Stockholm about the effects of care reforms on the work situation of care workers in Sweden and Germany. The empirical part of the research is a survey based research project by the two authors including about 600 care workers in Sweden and Germany. As Prof. Theobald indicated in her speech at the HdBA, Schwerin, 5.6.2014, the stability of employment in care professions is by far more intensive in Sweden than in Germany with an above average turnover of personnel. These differences are due to a complex combination of different factors including qualification, working conditions as well as work and life balance.