When Hospitals Provide HR Practices Tailored To Older Nurses, Will Older Nurses Stay? It May Depend On Their Supervisor

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

Hospital administrators in Canada and in many other countries are facing a challenge they have never confronted before – an ageing nursing workforce. This is occurring at the same time there is a global shortage of nurses, in large part as a result of the ageing of the nurse population in most developed countries. There is a growing consensus among researchers, professional nursing bodies and health-care policy makers that hospital administrators need to take steps to retain their older nurses. One of the proposed strategies to bolster the retention of older nurses is to introduce HR practices that are tailored to their needs and preferences.

This study focuses on two HR practices, flexible work options and performance evaluation practices. It focuses on those HR practices that are more directly under supervisor influence and the role played by the supervisor’s enactment of these practices. This research asks: what are the possible mechanisms through which perceptions of the availability of HR practices targeting older nurses influence their decision to remain with their hospital?

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

Francine Schlosser and Marjorie Armstrong-Stassen from the Odette School of Business at the University of Windsor performed a longitudinal study, which tested a model of the mechanisms through which HR practices are linked to older nurses’ intention to remain with their hospital.

The researchers used random sampling of registered nurses in a hospital setting. The participants were 528 registered nurses aged 45 to 67 years. Questionnaires were mailed to these nurses in 2006 and again a year later in 2007, and the data was analyzed. The questionnaire asked questioned relating to HR practices, perceived procedural justice, perceived supervisor support, perceived organizational support, organizational commitment and an intention to remain at the hospital. The researchers focused on the supervisors, as supervisors play a pivotal role in the day-to-day administration of hospital policy, practices and procedures in Canadian hospitals.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The researchers found the following:

- Few respondents perceived that their hospitals were engaging in HR activities specifically targeted to older nurses.
- How supportive older nurses perceived their hospital to be was determined by how fair and supportive their immediate supervisor was perceived to be.
- Older nurses reciprocated perceived support from their hospital by demonstrating a stronger attachment to their hospital through increased commitment and a greater intention to remain.
- There is high importance in matching HR practices under the control of the immediate supervisor with supervisor-related procedural justice. Older nurses’ perceptions of the availability of flexible work options and performance evaluation practices in their hospital,
were significantly positively related to how fairly they perceived their immediate supervisor to be in administering HR practices.

- Supervisors are perceived by nurses to be key representatives of the hospital organization. Supervisory management of relationships with employees will shape employee intentions and attitudes regarding the organization.

In summary, a proposed strategy to bolster the retention of older nurses is to introduce HR practices that are tailored to their needs and preferences. However, the results of the present study indicate that whereas the presence of such HR practices is definitely a prerequisite, the success of these practices may very well depend on how fairly immediate supervisors administer them. In other words, efforts to retain older nurses will require both supportive HR policies and practices and supportive supervisors.

**HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?**

The findings of this study provide both scholars and practitioners with important information about the mechanisms through which the perceived presence of HR practices relevant to older nurses operate to foster the retention of older nurses.

Hospital administrators can use this research to recognize the vital role that immediate supervisors play in the process. Human resource managers at hospitals can also benefit from this research, as it identifies that some HR practices will help hospitals to retain older nurses, which may provide a competitive advantage as the nursing shortage becomes more severe.

Researchers may also see value in this research. They should explore the role that other types of perceived supervisor-related justice, especially interpersonal and informational justice, may play in mediating the relationship between perceptions of HR practices and older nurses’ intentions to remain with their hospital. Researchers can also build on this research by investigating other related HR practices such as job redesign that may be important to the retention of older nurses.

**CITATION**


**KEYWORDS**

Hospital, Nursing, Retention, Supervisors, HR, Flexible Work Options, Performance Evaluation, Procedural Justice, Support, Commitment, Fairness

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

Fostering older nurses’ commitment and ultimately retention requires HR practices relevant to older nurses, supportive and fair supervisors, and a hospital that values their contribution and cares about their well-being.