Nursing Home Administrators' Level of Job Satisfaction

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Job satisfaction has been shown to have a direct relationship to the quality of work. Are nursing home administrators satisfied with their work? How do they compare with their counterparts in other industries? The results of this survey, using the Job Description Index (JDI) and the Job in General (JIG) scale as published by Bowling Green State University, indicate that nursing home administrators have a more compressed rate of job satisfaction than their counterparts in other industries. They focus their dissatisfaction on their coworkers and pay. They demonstrate dissatisfaction by rotating their positions at a rate of every 31 months. This suggests some significant problems in the development and maintenance of quality care and some areas that could be addressed to raise the level of satisfaction among nursing home administrators.

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With the anticipated increased longevity of the population, the proportion of the population over 85 will rise 31 percent by 2025 (Kassner and Bectel 1998) and have the highest rates of disability. Guralnik and colleagues (1995, 1) outline a picture of the future elderly:

Overall, 40 percent of people age 70 years and older report limitations in their ability to carry on their usual activities (Cohen and Van Nostrand, 1995). According to the 1990 U.S. Census, among persons age 65 years and older, 16 percent have difficulty with basic mobility-related activities such as walking short distances, and 12 percent have difficulty with basic self-care tasks (LaPlante, 1993). Five to 8 percent of noninstitutionalized adults age 65 years and older receive help with one or more activities of daily living (ADLs) (Wiener et al., 1990). In addition to this disability in community-dwelling older adults, 7 percent of people age 65 years and older reside in a nursing home, including 8 percent of women and 5 percent of men (Feinleib et al., 1994). Ninety percent of these individuals are dependent in one or more ADLs (Hing et al., 1989). Clearly, disability and dependency are highly prevalent in older adults.

Disability in old age is associated with poor quality of life, dependence on formal and informal care providers, and often substantial medical and long-term care costs. In addition, disabled persons are at increased risk of other adverse health outcomes, including further declines in function (Branch et al., 1984; Manton, 1988), acute illnesses and injuries (Branch and Meyers, 1987; Fried and Bush, 1988), falls (Nevitt et al., 1989; Tinetti et al., 1986, 1988), recurrent hospitalization, and mortality (Branch, 1980; Corti et al., 1994; Koyano et al., 1986; Manton, 1988; Warren and Knight, 1982). The more severe the disability, the higher the risk of these outcomes.

Much of the care of the elderly is provided through family members and spouses. In 1990, 28 percent of those over age 65 were living alone. Nearly 10 percent of baby boomers have remained single with no children (AARP 1998). The need for community-based and/or institutional care may well increase for the baby boomers, who may not have family care available.

"The primary sense of a nursing home is that it should be a community" (Lescoe-Long 2000, 70). Although numerous studies have addressed the turnover and job satisfaction of frontline employees in nursing homes (Lescoe-Long 2000; Brodaty, Draper, and Low 2003; Adendorff 2003), the importance of a stable, satisfied leadership has been neglected.

The purpose of this study is to provide data on the level of job satisfaction reported by Iowa’s nursing home administrators, their intention to remain in the profession, and their loyalty to their organizations as indicators of the viability of nursing home administration as an occupation, both now and in the future.

"Job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment are three indications of individuals’ attitude toward their work that have been studied extensively" (Strümpfer and Mlonzi 2001, 30). Job satisfaction is seen as a strong indicator of
such behaviors as attending work, maintaining quality standards, seeking improved work methods, and cooperating with other employees (Balzer et al. 1997). Although primary care workers are among those who have been surveyed regarding job satisfaction (Carter 1988), the survey discussed in this article is seminal research using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) and the Job in General (JIG) scale as published by Bowling Green State University to establish job satisfaction among nursing home administrators. “Employees’ satisfaction with their jobs offers important clues concerning the health and profitability of an organization. Measures of strengths and weaknesses tell practitioners where improvements can be made” (Bowling Green State University 2002).

METHODS
A listing of all licensed skilled nursing facilities (SNFs) in Iowa was obtained from the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals, Division of Health Facilities. All 413 facilities received surveys. These facilities represented a wide spectrum of services, locations, and ownerships. Facilities included those that were exclusively SNF and those with additional levels of care (e.g., assisted living, specialty units, independent living). Included were rural and urban facilities under a variety of ownership types: for-profit organizations, not-for-profit organizations, independent facilities, statewide chains, national chains, hospital-owned facilities, facilities under corporate ownership, individual/family-owned facilities, and various combinations of the above. Copies of the JDI scales and the JIG scale were obtained from the publisher, Bowling Green State University. The surveys were mailed to the administrator at the facility address with the introductory letter addressed to “Colleague.” Surveys were not addressed to individuals because of the anticipated movement of administrators among organizations. Anonymity of respondents was emphasized, thus eliminating respondent tracking. The response rate to the single mailing was 149, or 36 percent. This is an acceptable level for a single mailing (Vehovar and Lozar 1997). A follow-up mailing was not sent to prevent recording duplicated data.

“The Job Descriptive Index (JDI) measures five important aspects or facets of job satisfaction. The Job in General (JIG) scale evaluates overall job satisfaction” (Bowling Green State University 2002). The JDI and the JIG scale were chosen for this study because they are widely used to measure job satisfaction and they have been shown to be valid predictors (Balzer et al. 1997; Kinicki et al. 2002). In this administration of the JIG and JDI, the alpha was .8010. The scales administered were work on present job (JDI: work), pay (JDI: pay), people at work (JDI: co), supervision/assistance (JDI: super), and job in general (JIG). The scale addressing promotion was not included in this study because it is not applicable to this population. The JDI subscales contain an overall total of 63 items: work, 18 items; pay, 9 items; co, 18 items; and super, 18 items. The JIG scale contains 18 items. Each scale qualifies the context that the respondent is to use with each of the items. Each item consists of either
a singular descriptive word or a short phrase. The respondent is asked to mark "yes," "no," or "?" in the framework of the scale narrative.

A comparison of these respondents with national norms for managers was made. The demographic variables were analyzed to form a profile of the respondents and develop certain projections for the industry. The frequencies for the individual items in each scale were analyzed in an attempt to pinpoint those items that would highlight specific areas of dissatisfaction.

Demographic data collected included age, gender, number of years licensed as a nursing home administrator, number of facilities worked in, "the most challenging part of your work," hours per week at work, and years to planned retirement. The question regarding challenge was an open-ended question, and responses were grouped into five categories: employees, regulations, money, other, and incomplete. These five groups were determined by the frequency of responses given. Specifics regarding these areas were not collected.

RESULTS
Table 1 summarizes the profile of the respondents. The average nursing home administrator has a 25-year career and retires at age 60. The average administrator began his or her career at age 35. His or her resume will include, on average, 10 facilities. The respondents were skewed to women by 11.4 percent. The average workweek is 50 hours.

When the respondents' JDI and JIG scores were compared by age group, the 40 to 49 year olds had the lowest scores (M=13.3) (the average total score for the JDI and JIG) while the highest scores (M=15.1) were held by those administrators 60 years and older.

Correlations among all of the subscales and the JIG were performed. The JIG scale and the pay and coworker subscales of the JDI were of significance. The strongest correlation (r = .57 at p < .01, 2-tailed) showed consistency between perceptions about the administrators' present work and their job in general or career choice. As the respondents' satisfaction about their current work increased, so did their general attitude about their career choice. As might be expected, the more satisfied the respondents are with their current position, the more satisfied they are with their career choice. Less strong is the correlation between attitudes about their coworkers (co) and their JIG (r = .39 at p < .01, 2-tailed). The influence of coworkers on overall job satisfaction is less, but significant. The correlation between work (work) and their coworkers (co) was similar (r = .30 at p < .01, 2-tailed). As respondents reported their coworkers in a more positive light, their satisfaction with their work increased. The correlation between the JIG and pay was low (r = .24), but significant (p < .01, 2-tailed). Pay is related to the amount of satisfaction felt, but at a lower level. No other comparisons produced significant correlations. Analysis of the correlations between the scales and the individual demographics produced no significant relationships.
Respondents used singular terms to identify their challenges (Table 2). The two areas of primary challenge were "employees" and "regulations." Respondents did not clarify nor elaborate on the meaning of the terms used.

Figure 1 compares the 25th percentile, median, and 75th percentile scores for each of the JDI subscales and the JIG scale between the nursing home administrators and the national norms for managers. The spans of the scores for nursing home administrators are more compressed for all of the categories than for their counterparts in industry. The 75th percentile and the medians were higher for every category of the national norms than for the sample. In the pay subscale in the JDI, the administrators' median score is below the 25th percentile of the national norms.

DISCUSSION

The respondent profile in Table 1 provides data highlighting some characteristics of nursing home administrators. The average age for nursing home administrators to begin their career is determined by this study to be 35 years, indicating that administration is likely a second career choice. The highest rate of dissatisfaction occurred in the 40- to 49-year-old group. Although other areas of healthcare employ men in the top position more frequently than women, nursing homes do not. These administrators represent a very mobile group and change facilities every 31 months.

All of the job satisfaction indicator scores were more compressed for the nursing home administrators in this survey compared to the national norms for managers. The item analysis indicated that the respondents did not describe their job in the same upper, positive range as other managers do and were more likely to character-

| TABLE 2 |
| Response Categories and Rates: "As an Administrator, What Is the Most Challenging Part of Your Work?" |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>56.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulations</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

340
ize their position negatively. If, as Balzer et al. (1997) point out, the level of satisfaction has a direct effect on maintaining quality standards, the seeking of improved work methods, and cooperation with other employees, the nursing home industry may anticipate outcomes of lesser quality.

The scales data indicate only a minor relationship between job and/or work satisfaction and coworkers, while the leading challenge was employees. There appears to be some discrepancy between the respondents' perceived challenge and the influence of coworkers on job and work satisfaction. The item analysis for the coworker scale showed three negative areas: respondents perceived their coworkers as stupid, slow, and "gossipy." Perhaps because of the large number of minimum wage positions in nursing homes and the comparatively small number of professionals, expectations are higher than performance. The respondents' level of satisfaction with their cowork-
ers and supervisors was consistent with national norms.

In the item analysis, respondents demonstrated their general attitude toward their pay by a higher negative response to "well paid" than other items.

For the respondents, job satisfaction and satisfaction with career choice were more closely related to satisfaction with their coworkers than with pay, although satisfaction with pay was considerably lower than it was for their manager counterparts.

Although administrators are verbal about the difficulties of managing regulations, the primary issue that most influences their job and work satisfaction appears to be the quality of and satisfaction with coworkers.

Also, the perception that nursing home administrators have significantly increased work hours was not found to be true. They appear to manage their time better than expected.

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Future research should focus on the specific causes of nursing home administration job rotation and areas of dissatisfaction and their effects on the quality of the organization. "Managers are critical components of building a strong workforce. Staff members' relationship with their immediate manager determines their productivity levels and their length of stay in the organization" (Ribelin 2003, 70). Deming (1991) argues that lack of stability in organizational leadership can negatively affect the quality of organizational performance. An average tenure of 31 months would appear to be too short for leaders to establish a track record of continuous quality care.

"Nursing home administrators influence the quality of resident care, by influencing the organizational culture, by inefficient or efficient management practices, or through a combination of these factors" (Castle 2001, 765). More specifics regarding these factors could be a direction for future investigations.

Areas that this study identifies as problematic are pay rates and employees. Administrator educational programs could focus more specifically on human resource management. Training programs about management expectations and quality-of-care programs could be developed to address administrators' concerns about their employees. Pay scales for comparable responsibility in other healthcare segments may provide data that could result in the restructuring of compensation.

**References**


Job satisfaction is an individual's feeling regarding his or her work. It can be influenced by a multitude of factors. This article suggests that job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment are three indicators that have been studied and have been found to affect an individual's attitude toward work. The authors' survey also revealed that in Iowa, an administrator will work in a long-term-care facility for 31 months and that this healthcare executive is not very satisfied with his or her job.

I reviewed the statistics on Long Island, which included 74 long-term-care facilities, and found a 47 percent turnover rate in the period January 2000 through May 2004 in which 35 new administrators were hired. This trend concurs with the findings of this article and the work of Singh and Schwab (1998). Singh and Schwab indicate that the annual turnover among nursing home administrators may be 40 percent or higher.

The high turnover rate in the Long Island facilities may be linked to the acquisition of the facilities by new owners or may be linked to quality-of-care outcomes. From January 2000 through May 2004, new owners acquired several of the proprietary facilities, and the new management team often hired a new administrator. In addition, the outcome of the Annual State Survey can have a direct impact on the administrator's tenure in the organization. Therefore, job satisfaction may not be a significant factor in the longevity of an administrator, given that he or she may be required to leave a job for reasons other than job satisfaction.

On the other hand, stress and frustration on the job and the turnover of nursing home administrators may be linked to quality-of-care outcomes and dissatisfaction with the pressure or stress of their work. On Long Island, nearly all of the administrators have a significant problem obtaining nursing staff for their facilities.
and have encountered challenges in ensuring that facilities meet regulatory agency standards. In addition, facilities compete for the same patients/residents. This competition has had an effect on occupancy rates, which leads to a negative impact on the budget.

Although these issues have created challenges for the administrators, most administrators have a commitment to quality care and take pride in the institutions they serve. Because every administrator's decision affects the health and well-being of patients, residents, families, and staff, they must work to safeguard the rights and interests of these constituents. Administrators work long hours and have a commitment to their organizations to ensure that the population they serve receives quality care in a cost-effective manner. Although the statistics indicate a significant turnover in nursing home administrators and that job dissatisfaction is the major cause for this turnover, I suggest that many other variables affect this statistic, and additional research should be conducted to determine the cause for this high turnover rate.

Reference
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