Survey of Attitudes toward Work among Pharmacists Working in Large Group Hospitals

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Background: In Japan, although many new pharmacy graduates are keen to find work, the number of new job openings for hospital pharmacists is limited. In this survey, we explored the attitudes toward work among hospital pharmacists working in large group hospitals in order to help pharmacy students make informed career decisions.

Methods: A cross-sectional, self-administered survey of 614 hospital pharmacists working in 66 institutions of the Tokushukai Hospital Group across Japan was conducted.

Results: The proportion of usable data from surveyed pharmacists was 71.7%. Approximately 80% of the respondents desired to commit to careers in the healthcare field and were keen to gain opportunities for personal development. Personal development was the key item among reasons given for decisions about workplace and turnover. About 95% of the pharmacists surveyed were satisfied with their jobs. Compared to the job satisfaction level of other workers, that of pharmacists was considerably higher, although only 5.5% of pharmacists saw themselves staying in their current job until retirement. Job satisfaction data demonstrated significant differences among cohorts of age and years employed, although some specific items associated with job satisfaction could not be identified. Future work plans were influenced by age and job satisfaction.

Conclusion: This study suggests that pharmacists working in group hospitals nurture positive expectations for their careers. Management needs to make greater efforts to understand the professional characteristics of hospital pharmacists in order to better utilize their professional abilities and skills for patient care and for the benefit of other healthcare professionals.

Key words: pharmacist survey, hospital pharmacist, work attitude, job satisfaction, future work plan, career development

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INTRODUCTION

Work attitudes among pharmacists are important concerns for pharmacy students to consider their professional career. Many studies on pharmacists' work attitudes have been conducted outside Japan. Also, some studies in Japan have found that community pharmacists were dissatisfied with their status and their job satisfaction differed significantly according to gender and experience. Most hospital pharmacists regarded their profession as rewarding, but were less satisfied with their professional situation. For pharmacists working as hospital professionals, the main factors influencing job satisfaction were 'performance evaluation with career development' and 'innovative work environment'.

Today in Japan many new pharmacy graduates are looking for work as hospital pharmacists. However, new openings are scarce. Group hospitals consistently recruit a number of pharmacists each year, although work attitudes among their own pharmacists have been little examined until this study. The object of this study is to explore the attitudes toward work, as well as the degree of job satisfaction and future work plans, of hospital pharmacists in one group of hospitals, in the belief that this information could prove valuable to students wishing to make informed career decisions.

METHODS

The questionnaires used in our previous survey of community pharmacist were modified for this study of hospital pharmacists. Predetermined and categorized answers for this cross-sectional self-administered survey were designed for ease of response. The demographic characteristics covered eight items: employment status (regular: directly employed as full-time pharmacists; non-regular: any pharmacists who were not working full-time); gender; marital status; age (5 categories); years employed in current workplace (5 categories); the number of pharmacists in current workplace; the number of changes of workplace; and, the number of hospital pharmacies worked at since graduation. Regarding attitudes toward work, the questionnaire consists of seven questions (items): main reason for being a hospital pharmacist; reasons for choosing current workplace (ranked to top three); most important work-related concerns; degree of job satisfaction; reasons for dissatisfaction with current workplace (if any); future work plans; and, for those who had changed to their current workplace, their reasons for leaving (ranked 1-3).

Pharmacists of the Tokushukai Hospital Group (sixty-six hospitals of various sizes from 30 to 600 beds operated independently by each hospital president) were told by their pharmacy directors that participation in this unsigned survey was voluntary and that the data would only be used for research purposes. Each institution's completed answer sheets were sent to the investigator directly. The survey was performed between January and March 2010. The surveyed data were tested with chi-square tests, the Wilcoxon rank-sum test, and the Kruskal-Wallis test, depending on the data, using SPSS16.0 J for Windows (SPSS Japan Inc., an IBM company). We used Quantification theory 1 for job satisfaction and Quantification theory 2 for future work plans (Esumi Co. Ltd.). A p value of less than 0.05 was defined as statistically significant \textit{a priori}.

RESULTS

The rate of available data was 71.7%; the quantity of available data from 614 surveyed pharmacists in 66 hospitals was 440, which completed the demographic data. The effective data for each question, excluding responses with missing answers from the available data, were analyzed.

The demographic data of respondents are displayed in Table 1: regular employment 97.5%; female 59.8%; single 70.0%; less than 29 years 60.6%; and, less than 5 years employed 62.5%. The summary of attitudes toward work is given in Table 2. The main reasons for being a hospital pharmacist were the 'desire to work in healthcare field' (46.9%) and the 'opportunity for personal development' (32.4%). Also the primary reason for choosing the current workplace was the 'opportunity for personal development' (20.7%).

Levels of job satisfaction were categorized as follows: 80-100pts., 70-79pts., 60-69pts., 50-59pts., and <50pts., with a total of one hundred points (pts.)
possible. Approximately 95% of the respondents indicated satisfaction above 50pts. ‘Salary’ (23.0%) and ‘employment terms and conditions’ (22.1%) were two major reasons for dissatisfaction. Only 5.5% of respondents answered ‘stay until retirement’ for future work plans. ‘Lack of personal development’ was a major reason given for turnover.

There were differences concerning question items (attitude toward work) among comparison categories (demographic characteristics) (Table 3). Only one question item, the main reason for being a hospital pharmacist, did not show significant differences among all eight demographic items. Job satisfaction indicated significant differences in age (p=0.038) and years employed (p<0.001) in all respondents. Future work plan data showed significant differences in five main categories among all respondents: employment status (p=0.003), gender (p=0.011), marital status (p<0.001), age (p=0.040), and years employed (p=0.023).

The largest proportions of future work plans by gender and marital status were: ‘more than 5 years’ among males (33.0%) and married people (32.8%), and ‘less than 5 years’ among females (40.2%) and single people (41.2%) (see Table 4). ‘Stay until retirement’ among those employed for more than 10 years was 14.6%, which was the highest rate among those employed for other periods. The reason for leaving previous work demonstrated significant differences of marital status (p=0.037).

The relationships between job satisfaction and all questionnaire items were analyzed by Quantification theory 1. However, the adjusted coefficient of determination in this analysis came to 0.239, clearly a weak correlation (usually more than 0.5 is desirable). Therefore, any specific items were not recognized as factors related to job satisfaction.

The relationships between future work plans and all the questionnaire items were analyzed by Quantification theory 2. All correlation ratio (\( \eta^2 \)) among each pair of answers (items) of future work plans were above 0.25, which is preferable. The correlation ratio between ‘stay until retirement’ and ‘stay for less than 5 years’ was 0.634 (p<0.001), a fairly strong correlation. Possible items affecting future work plans to separate ‘stay until retirement’ and ‘stay for less than 5 years’ were: reasons for dissatisfaction (p=0.003) ; age (p= 0.013) ; years employed (p=0.049) ; and, job sati-
The category scores of those items indicate the intensity of factors distinguishing between the response ‘stay until retirement’ and the response ‘stay for less than 5 years’. In consideration of category scores, ‘more than 40 years’ in the categories of age and ‘80–100pts.’ in job satisfaction had a positive influence on future work plans, such as ‘stay until retirement’ (Figure 1). On the other hand,
‘22–25 years’ and ‘<50pts.’ resulted in ‘stay for less than 5 years’.

Age was one of the factors distinguishing ‘stay until retirement’ and ‘stay for more than 5 years’ (p < 0.001), ‘stay for less than 5 years’ (p = 0.013), and ‘undecided’ (p = 0.002). Job satisfaction clarified whether respondents answered ‘stay for less than 5 years’ and ‘stay until retirement’ (p = 0.046) or ‘stay for long term (more than 5 years)’ (p = 0.002). Job satisfaction was an indicator of sorting responses, such as ‘undecided’ and ‘stay for long term (more than 5 years)’ (p = 0.002) or ‘stay for less than 5 years’ (p = 0.024).

**DISCUSSION**

The proportion of regular employees among hospital pharmacists (97.5%) in this study was higher than that (80.1%) found among community pharmacists in our previous study.9 Female hospital pharmacists amounted to 59.8% in this study and 66.0% in Japan.10 Approximately 90% of respondents were below 40 years of age; therefore, our respondents were below the average age of hospital pharmacists (41.5 years).10 These results suggest that regular employees and younger pharmacists are key players in group hospitals, those committed to working under demanding conditions, such as on night duty or on tight schedules. Pharmacists of the Tokushukai Group have to work hard because, in line with hospital group policy, they provide dedicated pharmacy services both to ambulatory patients (dispensing, including patient care) and to inpatients (dispensing, IV mixture, drug information, pharmacy administration with inventory, and clinical pharmacy services). It is likely that the working circumstances of this group are less desirable for female pharmacists. Obtaining positions as hospital pharmacists, it seems, is more difficult because the number of vacancies has recently decreased, while hospital managers prefer to employ pharmacists who can easily adapt to required work conditions.

In this survey the main reason for being a hospital pharmacist was the ‘desire to work in the healthcare field’ and the ‘opportunity for personal development’, describing a thoroughly professional commitment and strong motivation for individual career development. The reasons given for choosing their current workplace, such as ‘personal development’, ‘well-known
large group’ and ‘policy and mission’, indicate that pharmacists hold career expectations in their organizations. It is notable that ‘work content’ was the most important concern for more than 40% of the respondents and ‘salary’ for only 3.4%. Nevertheless, ‘salary’ was the highest ranked reason for dissatisfaction. Perhaps it can be said that ‘salary’ is the major cause of dissatisfaction among hospital and community pharmacists, and among most workers regardless of occupation.³¹

Job satisfaction studies outside Japan regarding pharmacists were also discussed. On the whole, 67.2%,¹ 68%,¹² and 90.7%¹⁵ of pharmacists surveyed were satisfied with their jobs. In other studies, 78%,¹² 90%,¹⁴ and 60% of hospital pharmacists and 57% of community pharmacists were satisfied with their current jobs.¹⁵ Hospital pharmacists were categorically satisfied with their jobs, whatever their circumstances.¹,¹⁶

Approximately 95% of hospital pharmacists in this study were satisfied with their jobs compared to data for community pharmacists (96%),¹ which showed a higher rate of job satisfaction than the data for ordinary employees³ and in the above overseas studies, indicating a highly positive level of job satisfaction among hospital and community pharmacists. Job satisfaction rates differed significantly according to age and years employed among all respondents.

In this study, focusing on Japan, factors affecting job satisfaction could not be specified. However it has been reported in another study that ‘development’

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‘Innovative environment’ and ‘professional recognition’ were major factors among hospital pharmacists. Other important factors were the feelings that respondents were able to make good use of their abilities, and, in a study outside Japan, professional recognition.

Outside Japan, studies discuss the relationship between job satisfaction and job content. Pharmacists would like to spend more time in consultation and drug utilization management than in dispensing medications, and job satisfaction was negatively correlated to the amount of time spent dispensing. The job satisfaction of hospital pharmacists increased in proportion to the time spent in clinical pharmacy activities. Job satisfaction was strongly related to the risk of making dispensing errors. Management was an important and significant contributor to job satisfaction among hospital and community pharmacists. The above studies emphasize that clinical activities and pharmacy management contribute significantly to job satisfaction among hospital pharmacists.

Regarding future work plans: In this study, in spite of higher job satisfaction, only 5.5% of pharmacists expressed the belief that they would remain in their current workplace until retirement. However, approximately 60% of new college graduates wished to stay in their current job until retirement in Japan. This result suggests that hospital pharmacists tend to devote themselves to their profession and to feel higher job satisfaction, just as community pharmacists do, regardless of workplace or organization. Therefore hospital pharmacists develop an enthusiastic and professional mindset. Age and job satisfaction were significant indicators in deciding ‘future work plans’, and ‘more than 40 years of age’ and ‘more than 10 years employed’ appear to be key criteria.

Regarding turnover: In this study, ‘lack of personal development’ was the main reason given by all
hospital pharmacists for changing jobs compared to general workers. Reports from outside Japan cite several factors affecting turnover or the intention to stay in or leave a job: a good salary, good relationships with co-workers, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. In the late of 1980s personal reward was the most common concern for pharmacy students seeking their first job, whereas today, the working environment is the most important consideration.

Our study indicated that ‘personal development’ was the key issue for hospital pharmacists considering a long-term career, as a study undertaken outside Japan has confirmed. Increased rewards would not be a reality given the degree of control exercised by national health insurance systems in Japan. However, researchers outside Japan have found that clinical pharmacy activities significantly increase job satisfaction among hospital pharmacists.

CONCLUSIONS

‘Personal development’ is a key issue as long as hospital pharmacists stay in their jobs. Hospital administrators and pharmacy management need to try to understand the nature of hospital pharmacists: their concerns, what motivates them, and how best to utilize their professional ability and skills for the benefit of patients and other healthcare professionals. The evolution of clinical pharmacy can be seen as the history of pharmacists’ career development and the evolution of job satisfaction among hospital pharmacists. We hope that the results of this study of work attitudes will help pharmacy students make better-informed career decisions.

LIMITATIONS

Sixty-six hospitals in just one hospital group were surveyed; therefore, this sample does not represent Japanese hospital pharmacies in their entirety. This study is essentially a pilot study intend to stimulate further research focusing on job satisfaction, turnover, and the future work plans of hospital pharmacists.

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