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PREGLEDNI ČLANAK / REVIEW ARTICLE

Ostati ili otići: Retencija i migracija sestrinskog kadra od generacijskih razlika do ograničenja prakse

Stay or Leave: Retention and Migration of the Nursing Workforce from generational Differences to Practice Constraints

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Sažetak

Uvod: Zdravstveni sustav Republike Hrvatske suočen je s kroničnim nedostatkom medicinskih sestara i tehničara, pri čemu je osobito izazovno zadržati mlađi kadar u struci. Retencija sestrinskog kadra postaje ključna za održivost zdravstvene skrbi i kvalitetu rada. Mlađe generacije ulaze u profesiju s drugačijim očekivanjima u odnosu na starije kolege, osobito u kontekstu radnih uvjeta, međuljudskih odnosa, mentorstva te ravnoteže privatnog i profesionalnog života. Iako stručna literatura prepoznaje mjere potpore i profesionalnog razvoja kao temelj retencije, njihova se provedba često ograničava kroničnim manjkom kadra. U ovom članku razmatraju se generacijske razlike, specifičnosti milenijalaca (Generacija Y) i Generacije Z, čimbenici zadržavanja na radnom mjestu, prednosti duljeg ostanka za kvalitetu skrbi te uloga državnih politika u potpori mladim medicinskim sestrama i tehničarima, s posebnim naglaskom na nesklad između preporučenih mjera i stvarnih mogućnosti njihove provedbe u praksi.

Cilj: Cilj je rada analizirati situacijske probleme te različite stavove s obzirom na generacijske razlike.

Materijali i metode: Proveden je integrativni pregled znanstvene i stručne literature. Pretraživanje je provedeno upotrebom unaprijed definiranih ključnih riječi. Odabir radova temeljio se na kriterijima tematske relevantnosti, fokusa na sestrinsku profesiju i migracijske procese (PubMed, WHO, Ministarstvo zdravstva RH, HKMS).

Zaključak: Dugoročna kvaliteta skrbi i stabilni timovi rezultat su sustavnog ulaganja u mlade kadrove, jasnih strategija podrške te učinkovite organizacije rada

Ključne riječi: sestrinstvo, retencija, generacijske razlike, mladi kadar, kvaliteta skrbi

Kratak naslov: Retencija i migracija sestrinskog kadra

Abstract

Introduction: The healthcare system of the Republic of Croatia is facing a chronic shortage of nurses and nursing technicians, with the retention of younger professionals posing a particular challenge. Retention of the nursing workforce has become a key factor in ensuring the sustainability of healthcare services and the quality of care. Younger generations enter the profession with expectations that differ from those of older colleagues, particularly regarding working conditions, interpersonal relationships, mentorship, and work–life balance. Although professional literature recognizes support measures and professional development as the foundations of retention, their implementation is often limited by chronic staff shortages. This article examines generational differences, the specific characteristics of Millennials (Generation Y) and Generation Z, factors influencing job retention, the benefits of longer tenure for quality of care, and the role of state policies in supporting young nurses and nursing technicians, with particular emphasis on the discrepancy between recommended measures and the real possibilities for their implementation in everyday practice.

Aim: This paper aims to explain in more detail the situational problems and the different attitudes towards them due to generational differences.

Materials and methods: This is a review article; therefore, the text does not derive from data obtained through research. The data was collected by reviewing relevant literature using the listed keywords. The relevance of the papers was selected primarily by recency and respect for the topic, not older than 5 years, and nursing and migration in the first instance (PubMed, WHO, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Croatia, CCN).

Conclusion: Long-term quality of care and stable teams are the result of systematic investment in young staff, clear support strategies, and efficient work organization.

Keywords: nursing, retention, generational differences, young workforce, quality of care

Short title: Retention and Migration of the Nursing Workforce

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Uvod

Sestrinska profesija u Republici Hrvatskoj već se dulje vrijeme suočava s izraženim nedostatkom radne snage, povećanim radnim opterećenjem i rastućom fluktuacijom kadra, pri čemu se posebno ističe problem zadržavanja mlađih

Introduction

The nursing profession in the Republic of Croatia has for some time been confronted with a pronounced workforce shortage, increased workload, and growing staff turnover, with the problem of retaining younger nurses and nu-

medicinskih sestara i tehničara u struci. Prema podacima nacionalnih istraživanja, značajan broj mladih djelatnika razmišlja o promjeni radnog mjesta ili napuštanju struke nakon samo nekoliko godina rada, pa čak i nakon svega nekoliko mjeseci [1]. Glavni razlozi uključuju preopterećenje, osjećaj nedostatka podrške, ograničene mogućnosti profesionalnog razvoja i teškoće u usklađivanju radnog vremena s privatnim životom. Iako financijski stimulansi mogu privremeno utjecati na odluku o ostanku, praksa pokazuje da oni sami po sebi nisu dovoljni. Profesionalno zadovoljstvo, međuljudski odnosi i osjećaj pripadnosti timu jednako su važni, osobito za mlađe generacije koje u struku ulaze s drugačijim očekivanjima od svojih starijih kolega [2]. Zadržavanje mladog kadra zahtijeva dvosmjerni pristup koji kombinira strateško planiranje zdravstvenih ustanova i realne mogućnosti sustava da provede preporučene mjere potpore i mentorstva. U tom procesu ne smije se zanemariti ni iskusniji sestrinski kadar koji je podnio najveće opterećenje tranzicije zdravstvenog sustava, a od kojeg se u izmijenjenim profesionalnim okolnostima ponovno očekuje visoka razina prilagodbe.

Generacijske razlike i očekivanja

U sestrinskim timovima danas zajednički rade pripadnici više generacija, što donosi raznolikost iskustava, ali i potencijal za nesporazume. Starije generacije medicinskih sestara oblikovale su se u okruženju u kojem su stabilnost zaposlenja i dugotrajan ostanak u struci bili cijenjeni i prepoznati kao profesionalna norma ili kvaliteta osobe kao radnika [2]. Za njih je rad u istom timu i dugoročno ostajanje na radnom mjestu bilo simbol stručnosti i predanosti, a lojalnost ustanovi bila je visoko vrednovana. Nasuprot tomu, mlađe generacije, s osobitim osvrtom na Generaciju Z, promatraju profesionalni put fleksibilnije i mnogo fluidnije te očekuju da će njihove potrebe i vrijednosti biti prepoznate u radnom okruženju samim zaposlenjem. Od starijih se generacija očekivalo osobno dokazivanje predanim radom tijekom duljeg perioda (bez ili uz vrlo malo propusta s manjim naglaskom na kontinuiranu edukaciju i mentorstvo) kako bi se radnik, medicinska sestra ili tehničar, mogli smatrati ravnopravnim te poštivanim članom tima. S promjenom vremena u kojem živimo i radimo, jasno dolazi do promjene pristupa radniku, svaka jedinka vrijedna je i cijenjena osoba samim činom pristupanja nekom timu, što se u potpunosti odražava na očekivanja mladog radnika od tima kojemu se pridružuje [3]. Ravnotežu privatnog i profesionalnog života osobito je teško postići na radilištima zahtjevnijeg tipa jer je u pojedinim situacijama nemoguće jasno razgraničiti, odnosno odrediti prestanak radnog vremena te osjećaja odgovornosti spram zadatka koji se neplanirano nametnuo. U uvjetima povećanog radnog opterećenja i nedostatka sustavne podrške, mlađe medicinske sestre i tehničari češće razmatraju promjenu radnog mjesta na manje zahtjevno radno mjesto ili napuštanje struke. Ova očekivanja mladih zaposlenika često nisu u skladu s realnim mogućnostima zdravstvenih ustanova jer kroničan manjak kadra ograničava dostupnost mentora i kvalitetnu podrške, kao i pristup manje zahtjevnim radnim mjestima na koje se sve više preusmjerava stariji kadar, što dodatno utječe na odluku mladih djelatnika da ostanu u struci.

rsing technicians being particularly prominent. According to national research data, a significant proportion of young professionals consider changing jobs or leaving the profession after only a few years of work, or even after only several months [1]. The main reasons include work overload, a perceived lack of support, limited opportunities for professional development, and difficulties in balancing working hours with private life. Although financial incentives may temporarily influence the decision to stay, practice shows that they are not sufficient on their own. Professional satisfaction, interpersonal relationships, and a sense of belonging to a team are equally important, especially for younger generations who enter the profession with expectations different from those of their older colleagues [2].

Retaining young staff therefore requires a two-way approach that combines strategic planning by healthcare institutions with the realistic capacity of the system to implement recommended support and mentorship measures. In this context, it is also important not to overlook the experienced workforce that has so far carried the burden of an imperfect system, having grown, learned, and adapted in different times, and from whom renewed adaptation is now expected.

Generational differences and expectations

Today, nursing teams consist of members from several generations, bringing diversity of experience but also potential for misunderstanding. Older generations of nurses were shaped in an environment in which job stability and long-term commitment to the profession were valued and recognized as professional norms or indicators of personal work ethic [2]. Working within the same team and remaining in one position long-term symbolized expertise and dedication, and loyalty to the institution was highly valued.

In contrast, younger generations, particularly Generation Z, view their professional paths more flexibly and fluidly and expect their needs and values to be acknowledged by the work environment from the very moment of employment. Earlier generations were expected to prove themselves through dedicated work over a longer period (with little or no allowance for shortcomings and less emphasis on continuous education and mentorship) to be regarded as equal and respected members of the team. With changes in the social and professional context, there has been a clear shift in attitudes toward employees – each individual is now considered valuable and worthy of respect simply by joining a team, which is fully reflected in the expectations of young workers toward the teams they join [3].

Achieving work–life balance is particularly difficult in highly demanding workplaces, where it is often impossible to define clearly the end of working hours or to detach from a sense of responsibility for unforeseen tasks. Under conditions of increased workload and insufficient systemic support, younger nurses and nursing technicians more frequently consider transferring to less demanding workplaces or leaving the profession altogether. These expectations are often misaligned with the realistic capacities of healthcare institutions, as chronic staff shortages limit the availability of mentors and the quality of support. At the same

Kratko zadržavanje kadra na istom radilištu značajno ugrožava kvalitetu zdravstvene skrbi jer se smanjuje kontinuitet njege i gubi institucionalno znanje. Kad medicinske sestre i tehničari često mijenjaju radna mjesta, sustav gubi sposobnost razvijanja stabilnih timova koji poznaju specifičnosti pacijenata i organizaciju rada u pojedinoj jedinici. Svaki novi dolazak podrazumijeva vrijeme prilagodbe i upoznavanja s procedurama, kolegama i pacijentima, a taj se period u praksi često odvija pod pritiskom hitnih obveza i preopterećenja. U takvim okolnostima raste rizik od pogrešaka i propusta u komunikaciji te neadekvatnog praćenja pacijenata, što se izravno odražava na sigurnost i ishod skrbi. Kratko zadržavanje također slabi mogućnost sustavnog mentorstva i prijenosa znanja unutar tima jer se iskusni djelatnici usmjereni na očuvanje kvalitete skrbi stalno suočavaju s ulaskom novih članova koje je potrebno educirati, a pri tome nemaju dovoljno vremena ni resursa za obavljanje vlastitih zadataka. Posljedično dolazi do fragmentacije skrbi i smanjenja povjerenja među članovima tima, što dodatno otežava koordinaciju i učinkovitost rada. Stalna fluktuacija kadra često dovodi do emocionalnog umora preostalih zaposlenika koji preuzimaju veći dio posla i osjećaju nedostatak stabilnosti, a time se dodatno povećava rizik od daljnjeg odlaska. Kvaliteta zdravstvene skrbi koja se temelji na kontinuitetu sigurnosti i timskom radu u takvim uvjetima sustavno propada, stoga fluktuacija tima nije usmjerena samo na mlađi kadar već sve više obuhvaća i Generaciju Y koja se sve više usmjerava prema radilištima s manjim opsegom hitnih stanja.

Nove generacije odrasle su u digitalnom okruženju, navikle na brze informacijske tokove i društvene promjene, što se odražava na njihova profesionalna očekivanja i stil rada [4]. Posljedično, mlađe generacije preuzimaju odgovornost bez potpune podrške. Time se povećava rizik od profesionalnog sagorijevanja, pogreške, smanjenog zadovoljstva poslom i ranijeg napuštanja struke [5].

Mentorstvo, zadržavanje kadra i drugi faktori

Mentorski rad prepoznat je kao jedan od najučinkovitijih načina zadržavanja mladih medicinskih sestara i tehničara. Međutim, kao problem u mnogim zdravstvenim ustanovama uočava se neizvedivost planirane edukacije i supervizije te česte odgode ili djelomična provođenja dok mlađe medicinske sestre preuzimaju složene zadatke bez odgovarajuće pripreme [6]. To stvara začarani krug u kojem mjere koje bi trebale pridonijeti retenciji mladih djelatnika u praksi ostaju nedovoljno provedene, a izostanak njihov izostanak dodatno ubrzava fluktuaciju i smanjenje motivacije. Analizirajući komunikacijske situacije, vidljivo je da se starije generacije katkad oslanjaju na prešutno poštovanje mlađe osobe, iskustveno učenje promatranjem, pratnjom i rutinom, dok mlađe generacije traže više pojašnjenja, vremena za komunikaciju, strukturirane edukacije i jasne kompetencijske smjernice [7]. Kroničan manjak kadra dodatno pogoršava međuljudske odnose jer se taj prostor smanjuje, nesporazumi postaju učestaliji, a osjećaj profesionalne izolacije kod mlađih djelatnika pojačan.

Još jedan od bitnih čimbenika zadržavanja kadra osjećaj je opće sigurnosti i zaštićenosti osobnog identiteta. Sigurnost

time, less demanding positions are increasingly occupied by older staff, further influencing younger professionals' decisions to remain in the profession.

Short tenure in the same workplace significantly compromises the quality of healthcare, as continuity of care is reduced and institutional knowledge is lost. Frequent job changes prevent the development of stable teams familiar with patient needs and unit-specific work organization. Each new arrival entails a period of adaptation to procedures, colleagues, and patients, which in practice often occurs under pressure from urgent duties and workload overload. This increases the risk of errors, communication failures, and inadequate patient monitoring, directly affecting patient safety and care outcomes.

Short retention periods also weaken systematic mentorship and knowledge transfer within teams, as experienced staff focused on maintaining care quality must continually train new members without sufficient time or resources to perform their own duties. This leads to fragmented care and diminished trust among team members, further reducing coordination and efficiency. Constant staff turnover often results in emotional exhaustion among remaining employees, who assume greater workloads and experience instability, thereby increasing the risk of further departures. Consequently, declining care quality based on continuity, safety, and teamwork affects not only younger staff but also Generation Y, who are progressively seeking positions with lower exposure to acute and high-risk situations.

New generations have grown up in a digital environment, accustomed to rapid information flow and social change, which shapes their professional expectations and working styles [4]. As a result, younger professionals often assume responsibilities without adequate support, increasing the risk of burnout, errors, reduced job satisfaction, and early exit from the profession [5].

Mentorship, staff retention, and other factors

Mentorship is recognized as one of the most effective strategies for retaining young nurses and nursing technicians; however, many healthcare institutions have difficulties in implementing planned education and supervision. Training and supervision are frequently postponed or only partially conducted, while younger nurses are expected to perform complex tasks without adequate preparation [6]. This creates a vicious cycle in which measures intended to improve retention remain insufficiently implemented, and their absence further accelerates turnover and demotivation.

In terms of communication, older generations may rely on implicit respect, experiential learning through observation, accompaniment, and routine, whereas younger generations seek clearer explanations, more time for communication, structured education, and well-defined competency guidelines [7]. Chronic staff shortages further exacerbate interpersonal tensions by limiting opportunities for communication, increasing misunderstandings, and intensifying feelings of professional isolation among younger staff.

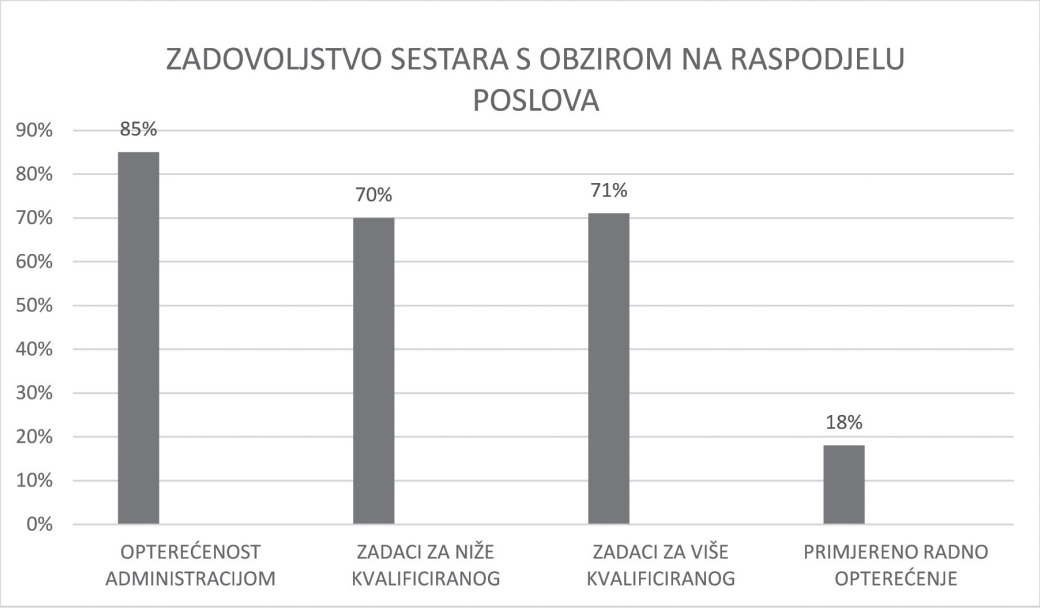
medicinskih sestara na radnom mjestu postaje sve veći izazov u suvremenom zdravstvenom sustavu jer se suočavaju s različitim oblicima rizika koji ugrožavaju njihovu fizičku i psihičku dobrobit. Fizički ili psihički napadi pacijenata ili članova obitelji predstavljaju ozbiljan problem jer medicinske sestre često rade u situacijama visokog emocionalnog stresa, a pri tome nemaju dovoljno resursa ni adekvatne zaštite. Takvi incidenti mogu dovesti do straha, sagorijevanja i smanjenog osjećaja profesionalne sigurnosti, što izravno utječe na kvalitetu skrbi. Uz to, kroničan manjak financijskih sredstava, osobito za vrijeme nedavne pandemije, ograničava mogućnosti zdravstvenih ustanova da osiguraju sigurnosnu opremu, adekvatnu fizičku zaštitu i dovoljan broj osoblja (pomoćnog, zaštitarske struke, njegovatelja), a time se povećava rizik od izloženosti opasnostima, kao i opterećenje preostalih djelatnika. Nedostatak sustavne edukacije o prevenciji i reagiranju na nasilne situacije dodatno smanjuje sposobnost sestara da se zaštite. Sigurnost na radnom mjestu stoga postaje ključan preduvjet ne samo za profesionalno zadovoljstvo i zadržavanje kadra nego i za očuvanje kvalitete i kontinuiteta zdravstvene skrbi jer nesigurno okruženje smanjuje sposobnost sestara da pružaju učinkovitu i pravovremenu njegu ili njihovu želju za ostankom na radnom mjestu rizičnijeg profila.

Odlučujući čimbenici koji utječu na zadržavanje kadra već su nabrojani te uključuju radne uvjete, organizaciju rada, sigurnost, opterećenje poslom, međuljudske odnose, podršku nadređenih, mogućnosti edukacije i profesionalnog napredovanja te osjećaj sigurnosti i pripadnosti timu, no ovdje treba istaknuti i adekvatno priznavanje stručne spreme [1, 3]. Bez obzira na navedeno, financijski stimulansi znatno doprinose zadovoljstvu poslom te snažno utječu na odluku o ostanku. Ograničavanjem mogućnosti provođenja većine mjera koje bi poticale zadržavanje mladih zaposlenika stvara se začarani krug u kojem sustav nije u mogućnosti pružiti sve preporučene oblike potpore i mentorstva [6]. Iz rada „Studija perspektive medicinskih sestara“ provede-

Another crucial factor in retention is the sense of overall safety and protection of personal identity and well-being. Workplace safety for nurses has become an increasing challenge in contemporary healthcare systems due to exposure to various risks threatening their physical and psychological integrity. Physical or verbal assaults by patients or family members represent a serious issue, as nurses frequently work in emotionally charged environments without sufficient resources or adequate protection. Such incidents contribute to fear, burnout, and diminished professional security, directly affecting health care quality.

In addition, chronic financial constraints—particularly evident during the recent pandemic—limit healthcare institutions' ability to provide safety equipment, physical security, and sufficient staffing levels, including auxiliary and security personnel. This increases exposure to hazards and workload burdens. The lack of systematic education on preventing and responding to violent situations further reduces nurses' capacity for self-protection. Workplace safety thus becomes a fundamental prerequisite not only for professional satisfaction and retention but also for maintaining the quality and continuity of healthcare delivery.

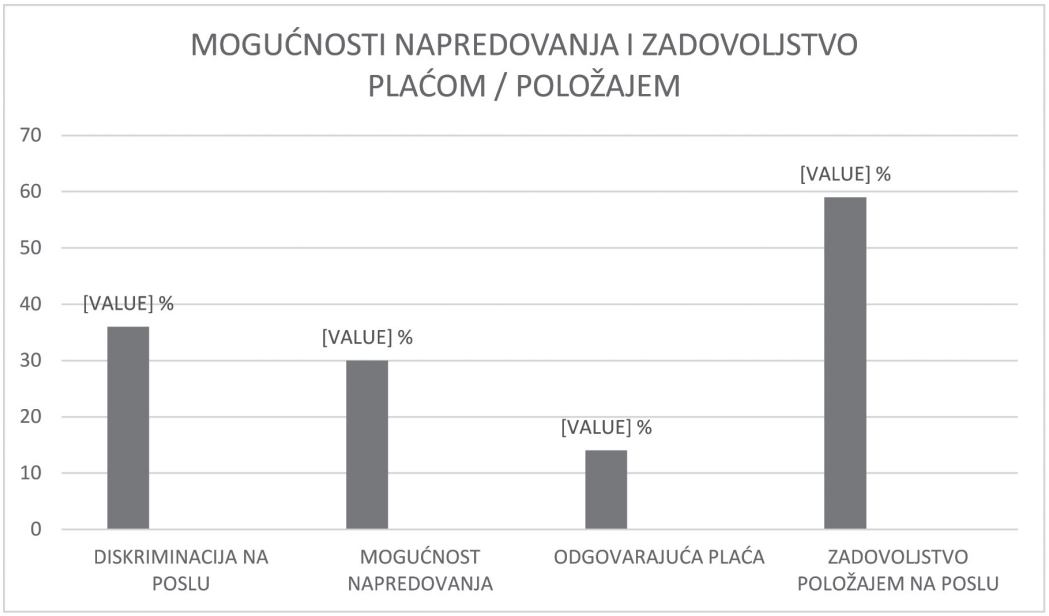
Decisive factors influencing retention include working conditions, work organization, safety, workload, interpersonal relationships, managerial support, opportunities for education and career advancement, and a sense of security and team belonging, as well as appropriate recognition of educational qualifications [1, 3]. Despite all other factors, financial incentives remain highly influential on job satisfaction and strongly affect decisions to stay. Limiting the implementation of retention-promoting measures creates a cycle in which the system is unable to provide all recommended forms of support and mentorship [6]. From the work "Study of the Perspectives of Nurses" conducted in 2024 under the mentorship of the CCN, we can extract additional data that speak about the attitudes of nurses about working conditions and overload and show general satisfaction with team



Graf/Chart 1. Zadovoljstvo sestara s obzirom na raspodjelu poslova / Nurses' satisfaction with the division of work tasks

nog 2024. godine pod pokroviteljstvom HKMS-a mogu se izdvojiti podaci koji govore o stavovima medicinskih sestara s obzirom na uvjete rada i preopterećenost te općenito prikazuju zadovoljstvo vezano za timsku komunikaciju, a govore u korist ovog rada te su prikazani u tablicama koje slijede [9]. Valja istaknuti da tek 42 % magistara sestrinstva ima priznat svoj stupanj obrazovanja u odnosu na 87 % prvostupnika kojima je stupanj obrazovanja priznat [9]. Primjerena institucionalna valorizacija i formalno priznavanje viših kvalifikacija te uloženih obrazovnih napora pojedinca predstavljaju temelj profesionalnog uvažavanja, stoga nesrazmjer u sustavu izravno demotivira visokoobrazovani kadar.

communication, which speaks in favor of this text and is shown in the tables below [9]. It should be emphasized that only 42% of master's degree holders have their education degree recognized compared to 87% of bachelor's degree holders whose education degree is recognized [9]. It should be unnecessary to emphasize that the effort of any individual in investing in their own education and qualifications should be praised and recognized; however, here is an opportunity to emphasize it.



Graf/Chart 2. Napredovanje, plaća i položaj / Promotion, salary and position

Graf/Chart 3. Zadovoljstvo komunikacijom u timu s obzirom na radno mjesto / Satisfaction with communication in the team considering the workplace

Potpora Republike Hrvatske mladim medicinskim sestrama i tehničarima

Republika Hrvatska provodi niz mjera za zadržavanje mladih djelatnika, uključujući povećanje plaća i dodataka za rad u otežanim uvjetima, programe stipendiranja učenika i studenata sestrinstva, financiranje stručnog usavršavanja i edukacija te inicijative za unapređenje profesionalnog razvoja i napredovanja [8]. U praksi, učinkovitost ovih mjera ograničena je manjkom kadra jer financijski stimulansi i programi usavršavanja ne mogu u potpunosti nadomjestiti nedostatak mentorske potpore, preopterećenje radnim zadacima i ograničen kapacitet sustava da provede sve preporučene mjere.

Zaključak

Retencija mlađeg sestrinskog kadra ključno je pitanje budućnosti sestrinske profesije i kvalitete zdravstvene skrbi u Hrvatskoj. Generacijske razlike same po sebi nisu problem, ali u kombinaciji s kroničnim manjkom kadra postaju značajan izazov jer onemogućuju provedbu svih mjera potpore i mentorstva potrebnih za zadržavanje mladih medicinskih sestara i tehničara. Samo sustavnim ulaganjem u ljudske resurse, realno provedivim strategijama potpore i promišljenom organizacijom rada moguće je osigurati dugoročno zadržavanje mladih djelatnika, stabilne timove i visoku kvalitetu skrbi.

Nema sukoba interesa.

Support of the Republic of Croatia for young nurses and nursing technicians

The Republic of Croatia has implemented various measures to retain young professionals, including salary increases and allowances for work in difficult conditions, scholarship programs for nursing students, funding for professional training and education, and initiatives aimed at enhancing professional development and career advancement [8]. In practice, however, the effectiveness of these measures is constrained by staff shortages, as financial incentives and training programs cannot fully compensate for insufficient mentorship, excessive workloads, and limited system capacity to implement all recommended measures.

Conclusion

Retention of the younger nursing workforce is a crucial issue for the future of the nursing profession and the quality of healthcare in Croatia. Generational differences in themselves are not problematic, but when combined with chronic staff shortages, they become a significant challenge, as they hinder the implementation of support and mentorship interventions necessary for retaining young nurses and medical technicians. Only through systematic investment in human resources, realistically implementable support measures, and thoughtful work organization can long-term retention of young professionals, stable teams, and high-quality care be ensured.

Author declares no conflict of interest.

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