

Challenges for healthcare Managers in 2023

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Original Article

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Abstract:

Introduction: Managers in the field of healthcare face many challenges that are specific to this area and are caused by the dynamic and constantly changing healthcare environment.

Research sample and research objective: The main research objective was to evaluate significant aspects of financing and organizing healthcare systems, summarize assumptions for the successful functioning of a healthcare system, assess factors influencing healthcare spending, and predict the challenges that healthcare managers will face in 2023 at both the micro (individual healthcare facilities) and macro (healthcare system in Slovakia) levels. The research sample was selected by deliberate selection and consisted of 109 respondents: healthcare

managers (n=16), experts from the field of health management (n=15), experts from the field of human resources (n=19), directors of health facilities (n=10), medical (n=28) and paramedical staff (n=21).

Methods: Statistical testing was carried out using the methods of inferential statistics: the independent samples t-test was used to compare mean scores between two groups (RQ1 and RQ2) and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare mean scores among three groups (RQ 3).

Results: We found out there are no differences in the respondents' opinions on the challenges for healthcare managers in 2023 based on their job titles, the type of health facility in which they work or according to the length of practice.

Conclusion: According to the respondents, the most current trends and challenges for Slovak healthcare are: the need for qualified medical personnel, a focus on retaining employees and solving the growing costs of healthcare.

Biography of the first author

In 2004, I finished my studies at the Faculty of Medicine, Comenius University, Bratislava. In 2013 at the Slovak Medical University, Bratislava in the Department of Trauma Surgery, I conducted the Specialization Exam on 21.10.2013. In the period 2012-2014, I was in post-graduate study in surgical science at The University of Edinburgh, UK. In 2020, I obtained the title of Public Health Administration/ MHA at St. Elisabeth University of Health Care and Social Work and at the University Institute of Economic and Legal Sciences the title of Master of Business Administration.

In the period 2006-2009, I worked at the Faculty Hospital in Nitra. From 2009-2011 I worked at the University Hospital of Wales as a doctor in the Department of Orthopedics and Traumatology (Clinical Fellow Trauma and Orthopedic Department, SpR) and as a doctor in the Department of Emergency Medicine (Clinical Fellow Accident and Emergency Department, Locum SpR). Between 2011-2012 I was employed at Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital as a doctor in the Department of Orthopedics and Traumatology (Clinical Fellow Trauma and Orthopedic Department, SpR). Next, until 2014, I worked at the Hospital and Polyclinic of Saint Luke in Galanta as a doctor in the Department of Trauma Surgery and Orthopedics and as a Chief Physician in the Central Patient Intake Department (from 01.01.2014). Until 2015, I worked at Uherské

Hradiště Hospital, JSC as Deputy Head of the Trauma Department. In the period 2015-2016, I worked as a doctor in the Department of Trauma Surgery SZU UNB.

Since 2016, I have been working at the Hospital with Polyclinic Trnavské mýto as a doctor in the Orthopedic Department. In 2023, I finished my rigorous work at the Faculty of Public Health, Slovak Medical, Bratislava.

Introduction

The qualification of managers in terms of management skills is one of the most important factors in the continuous success of each organization, and utilizing such skills can have a positive contribution to the effectiveness of the organization while improving the performance of the employees in line with the objectives and goals of the organization (1).

In the field of healthcare, managers face many challenges that are unique to this field. These challenges are caused by a dynamic healthcare environment that is constantly changing. Individual challenges are diverse and include changes in the demographic makeup of the population, technological improvements, healthcare costs, staff shortages and many others.

Healthcare managers are responsible for managing and organizing the delivery of healthcare in healthcare facilities that is critical to the health and well-being of patients. We highlight some of the biggest challenges facing healthcare managers.

The first and basic challenge for healthcare managers is to ensure quality and safe healthcare. Quality assurance in healthcare encompasses various aspects, including protecting patients from harm, optimizing treatment, minimizing the risk of infection and reducing healthcare errors (2).

Managers must create and implement quality assurance systems, monitor the performance of healthcare workers and continuously improve healthcare delivery processes.

Financing healthcare facilities is a complex matter that often presents a challenge to healthcare managers. Healthcare facilities must manage the rising costs of healthcare technology, increasing healthcare demands and changes in healthcare legislation. Healthcare managers must effectively manage and plan the budget of healthcare facilities and look for new ways of financing to ensure the financial stability of the facility and ensure quality healthcare.

Another challenge is reducing healthcare costs. Healthcare costs are still high and rising in many countries. Managers must find ways to reduce costs without affecting the quality of healthcare. They can use different strategies such as optimizing healthcare delivery processes, minimizing waste, improving the management of medicines and materials and improving with the use of technology.

Technological progress in the field of healthcare has brought new possibilities in the diagnosis, treatment and monitoring of patients. Healthcare managers must be able to keep up with the rapid pace of technological development and implement new technologies that improve patient care. This also includes investments in electronic health records, telemedicine and mobile applications for patients.

Human resources are crucial for the provision of quality healthcare. Healthcare managers must be able to find, hire and retain qualified healthcare personnel. Medical personnel can be classified as a helping profession, which is characterized by close and regular contact with people in addition to helping other people. This work is called a mission because their primary goal is to help others (3). Furthermore, healthcare managers must ensure sufficient professional education and training for their employees to ensure the quality of healthcare delivery.

Research objective

The main research objective was to evaluate significant aspects of financing and organizing healthcare systems, summarize assumptions for the successful functioning of the healthcare system, assess factors influencing healthcare spending and predict the challenges that healthcare managers will face in 2023 at both the micro (individual healthcare facilities) and macro (healthcare system in Slovakia) levels. The partial goals were to find out the prerequisites for the successful functioning of the healthcare system, including opinions on actual and alternative ways of financing healthcare, material and human resources and new trends and challenges for the Slovak healthcare system, and to find out the differences in the opinions of the respondents based on their job position, according to the type of healthcare facility in which they work and according to the length of their work experience. To find out respondents' opinions on the challenges for healthcare managers in 2023, we set the following research questions:

RQ1: Are there differences in respondents' views on the challenges for healthcare managers in 2023 based on their job titles?

RQ2: Are there differences in respondents' opinions on the challenges for healthcare managers in 2023 according to the type of health facility in which they work?

RQ3: Are there differences in respondents' opinions on challenges for healthcare managers in 2023 according to the length of practice?

Research sample and methodology

To achieve the goal of the work, an analysis of available statistical sources was used, as well as trends reported in foreign professional magazines and a quantitative (questionnaire) survey.

The research sample was selected by deliberate selection and consisted of 109 respondents: healthcare managers (n=16), experts from the field of health management (n=15), experts from the field of human resources (n=19), directors of health facilities (n=10), medical (n=28) and paramedical staff (n=21). According to the type of health facility, 45 respondents who work in a state health facility and 64 respondents who work in a non-state (private) health facility participated. According to the length of experience, 22 respondents with 0-5 years of experience and

Table 1 Average Likert scale score – respondents' answers (according to job title) to the question "How do you rate the importance of the following trends and challenges for Slovak healthcare?"

	Manager, Expert, Director	Medical, paramedical staff
Virtual and remote recruitment - remote interviews	3,23	2,57
Temporary personnel solutions - hiring employees for specific projects as needed	3,07	2,82
Focus on employee retention	4,53	4,43
Favoring employees over employers	2,93	2,61
Appropriate workplace safety measures related to potential future variants of COVID	3,87	4
Addressing rising healthcare costs	4,32	4
The need for qualified medical personnel	4,7	4,37
Expanding the use of telehealth (telemedicine) and virtual healthcare.	3,37	2,88
Protection against cyber attacks	3,18	2,24

36 respondents with 6-10 years of experience took part in the survey. The largest group of respondents were respondents with 11 or more years of experience. As a tool, we used a questionnaire of our own construction, which contained socio-demographic questions and questions related to the researched area. Answers to research questions were obtained using the methods of inferential statistics: the independent samples t-test was used to compare mean scores between two groups (RQ1 and RQ2) and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare mean scores among the three groups (RQ 3).

Results

Based on the answer to the items related to RQ1, the obtained results could not clearly confirm the existence of a difference in the respondents' opinions on the challenges for health care managers in 2023 based on their job position. Therefore, we used the T-test of independent samples ($t=-0.11127$; $p=0.456$). Since $p>0.05$ it can be confirmed that the result is not significant, so RQ1 can be answered that there are no differences in the respondents' opinions on the challenges for healthcare managers in 2023 based on their job titles.

According to the results, it is possible to observe different scores between the answers according to the type of medical facility. As with RQ1, we used the T-test of independent samples ($t=-0.07776$; $p=0.469$). Since $p>0.05$ it can be confirmed that the result is not significant, so RQ2 can be answered that there are no differences in the opinions of the respondents on the challenges for healthcare managers in 2023 according to the type of healthcare facility in which they work.

The obtained results in relation to RQ3 cannot clearly confirm the existence of a difference in respondents' opinions on the challenges for healthcare managers in 2023 according to the length of experience of the respondents. For this reason, we used a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) ($t= 0.32$; $p=0.729$). Since $p>0.05$ it can be confirmed that the difference is not significant, so RQ3 can be answered that there are no differences in respondents' opinions on challenges for healthcare managers in 2023 according to the length of practice.

Discussion

The achieved results show that, according to the respondents, the most important areas for the proper functioning of the healthcare system in

Table 2 Average Likert scale score – respondents' answers (by type of facility) to the question “How do you rate the importance of the following trends and challenges for Slovak healthcare?”

	State healthcare facility	Non-state (private) healthcare facility
Virtual and remote recruitment - remote interviews	3,53	3,26
Temporary personnel solutions - hiring employees for specific projects as needed	3,29	3,47
Focus on employee retention	4,49	4,15
Favoring employees over employers	3,18	3,89
Appropriate workplace safety measures related to potential future variants of COVID	3,45	4,63
Addressing rising healthcare costs	4,21	4,05
The need for qualified medical personnel	3,82	3,75
Expanding the use of telehealth (telemedicine) and virtual healthcare.	3,25	3,11
Protection against cyber attacks	3,09	2,12

Table 3 Average Likert scale score – respondents' answers (according to the length of practice) to the question “How do you rate the importance of the following trends and challenges for Slovak healthcare?”

	0-5 years	6-10 years	11 years and more
Virtual and remote recruitment - remote interviews	4,3	3,56	2,08
Temporary personnel solutions - hiring employees for specific projects as needed	3,87	4,11	4,24
Focus on employee retention	4,48	3,66	3,12
Favoring employees over employers	3,96	3,88	4,69
Appropriate workplace safety measures related to potential future variants of COVID	3,85	3,08	4,29
Addressing rising healthcare costs	3,27	3,43	4,33
The need for qualified medical personnel	2,82	4,07	3,61
Expanding the use of telehealth (telemedicine) and virtual healthcare.	3,99	3,56	3,44
Protection against cyber attacks	3,57	3,63	2,81

Slovakia are: improving the health status of the population (individuals, families), protecting the population against health threats and providing affordable and fair care. The obtained results correspond to the premise of the World Health

Organization (WHO) for a properly functioning health system (4) as well as to the views of Simoens and Scott (5), who consider the focus on improving the health status of the population and its protection against health threats neces-

sary to achieve a fully integrated health system.

According to the respondents, the most current trends and challenges for the Slovak healthcare industry are a need for qualified medical personnel, a focus on employee retention and a solution to the rising costs of healthcare. The obtained results can also be supported by the results of a study by Walden University (6), which pointed out that even before the COVID-19 health crisis hit, healthcare managers were trying to fulfil the demand for health workers. The shortage of qualified health personnel is only expected to increase, and the competition to recruit and retain health professionals and to fill vacancies in the health sector has been and will continue to be a major challenge for the management of health systems. Retaining employees is a big challenge for the healthcare industry. A similar opinion is presented by Sargent (7), who says that retaining employees requires prioritizing the fulfilment of work tasks by employees and improving organizational culture. On the one hand, companies offer educational programs, health and wellness packages, and career advancement opportunities. On the other hand, managers are retrained in the area of communication, and by improving the working environment they can increase the retention rate of employees.

Conclusion

The healthcare system in Slovakia is based on the universal principles of the availability of healthcare, mandatory health insurance, a basic healthcare package covered by public insurance and competitiveness of the insurance model, which enables selective contracting (contracting) of providers of health services and flexible pricing of health services care (8).

The most important areas for the proper functioning of the healthcare system in Slovakia are: improving the health status of the population (individuals, families), protecting the population against health threats and providing affordable and fair care. Regarding the importance of monitoring and ensuring the correct functioning of the segments for the correct functioning of the healthcare system in Slovakia, the following segments are the most important: quality provision of healthcare services, human resources in the healthcare sector and essential healthcare products and technologies. The results of the

survey pointed to prerequisites that can help the successful functioning of the healthcare system in Slovakia: a pro-patient approach, financial management - ensuring sufficient funds for all types of provided care, and providing care through interdisciplinary providers (providing several types of care in one place).

In conclusion and on the basis of the obtained results, it can be stated that according to the respondents, the most current trends and challenges for Slovak healthcare are: a need for qualified medical personnel, a focus on retaining employees and solving the growing costs of healthcare.

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