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(Addressing the problem of staff shortage, in Proper Care, UK)

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Table of Content:

Nature of the Problem	3
Impact of Staff shortage	3
PESTLE Analysis of the Problem	4
<i>Political Factors</i>	4
<i>Economic Factors</i>	4
<i>Social Factors</i>	4
<i>Technological Factors</i>	5
<i>Environmental Factors</i>	5
<i>Legal Factors</i>	5
Staff Shortage Cause-and-Effect Analysis	5
<i>Causes</i>	5
<i>Effects</i>	5
Evaluation of Alternative Solutions	6
<i>International Recruitment</i>	6
<i>Increase Training Opportunities</i>	6
<i>Strategies to Increase Retention Rate</i>	6
<i>Improve Healthcare Management</i>	7
Implementing Improved Healthcare Management	7
References	8

UNDERSTANDING AND SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF STAFF SHORTAGE IN PROPER CARE, UK (REPORT)

The problem of staff shortage in the United Kingdom healthcare sector is one that has alarmed stakeholders from within and outside the sector. The problem has the NHS trust and general practice as it can be seen in the shortage of nurses and social care practitioners (Iacobucci, 2016). In light of this, it is important that the country addresses the issue of staff shortage in healthcare in order to avoid the adverse health effects that come with limited number of healthcare workers.

Nature of the Problem

Staff shortage, in broad terms, refers to a situation in which an industry has fewer workers than it needs as a result of its inability to attract and retain qualified applicants. Whenever an industry suffers from the problem of staff shortage, it runs the risk of experiencing a drop in the quality of services it produces. Similarly, the problem of staff shortage in the UK healthcare can be disastrous for the quality of services that the sector provides to the people of United Kingdom. It is also the case that the problem of shortage of staff in the UK healthcare sector is caused by a variety of factors that can be traced to different issues that have affected the country (Buchan and O'May, 2019). It is, therefore, important to understand that the problem does not have one cause, but many.

Impact of Staff shortage

One of the main impacts that staff shortage in healthcare will have is poor healthcare services. As a result of understaffing, the few healthcare professionals available will be insufficient to undertake the health procedures they need to carry out on all the patients that present their health problems to the healthcare institutions. As a result, the few available healthcare professionals will provide poor services to patients. Another impact that the problem will have on existing healthcare professionals is that it will drive them to ask for improved compensation in order to be receive fair remuneration for the extra work they have to do. Thirdly, the problem of shortage of staff in healthcare will have the impact of increasing the patient mortality rate. Poor health outcomes that will ensue as a result of the shortage of staff can easily degenerate to deaths, which will cause a rise in the patient mortality rate. Finally, the problem of shortage of staff in the healthcare sector will have the impact of a high turnover rate. The existing healthcare professionals will be overwhelmed by the volume of work they have to accomplish given the extent to which the ratio of healthcare workers to patients is skewed against the healthcare workers (Drennan and Ross, 2019). The poor staffing issue will make the work environment unfit for them to continue thus leaving the country to seek employment in other countries.

PESTLE Analysis of the Problem

Political Factors

The issue of Brexit where the United Kingdom left the European Union as a result of political issues championed by politicians has contributed to the problem of shortage of staff in the healthcare sector. Currently, healthcare professionals from other European countries that are still part of the EU have difficulties entering the United Kingdom, which limits the pool of professionals from which the NHS can hire workers. Moreover, some of the healthcare workers who were from other European Union Countries at the time the Brexit decision was made through a referendum decided to leave the country due to the new regulations on EU citizens in the country (Simpkin and Mossialos, 2017). In addition, the top political parties in the country have constantly disagreed on how healthcare and the NHS should be managed. As a result, the sector has been poorly managed; a problem that has contributed to the issue of shortage of staff in healthcare sector.

Economic Factors

The economy of the country had suffered from the economic recession that had taken place in 2008. While it is true that the economy was recovering, the residual effects of the economic depression were still affecting the country. This externally affected the healthcare sector as funding the NHS became difficult for the country. In addition to the residual effects of the economic depression, it is also the case that economic regulations have contributed to the problem of shortage of staff in healthcare. Economic regulations affect the ability of healthcare institutions to hire and maintained experts as they command high salaries (Cooper et al, 2021). Finally, the country's economy has suffered from the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, healthcare organizations and the NHS have experienced economic challenges that have contributed to the shortage of staff in healthcare.

Social Factors

One key social factor that has externally contributed to the problem of staff shortage is the increase in average age in the country. Statistically, older individuals tend to seek medical services more than their younger counterparts. Therefore, the increase in number of the elderly has led to an increase in demand for healthcare services, which has meant that the existing healthcare professionals are insufficient to deal with the demand (Grosios, Gahan, and Burbidge, 2018). Secondly, the UK population has increasingly been aware of their health matters, which has drove them to seek healthcare services more than in previous years hence increasing the demand for healthcare services.

Technological Factors

Healthcare is increasingly connected to technology such that healthcare professionals are required to be conversant with sophisticated technological procedures. However, there are few healthcare professionals with the technological know-how to operate the machines needed to provide healthcare hence the shortage of staff.

Environmental Factors

The public is acutely aware of the healthcare industry's contribution to the degradation of the environment. The sector is ranked among the most pollutive industries and has been noted as destructive to the environment. As a result, members of the public are reluctant to work in the sector as this means this will be enabling the degradation of the environment; a situation that causes shortage of staff.

Legal Factors

The laws that currently govern the country as a non-EU nation are not favorable to foreign EU citizens in the country. As a result, EU citizens who work as healthcare workers in the UK have been leaving for other EU countries where the laws favor their residence.

Staff Shortage Cause-and-Effect Analysis

Causes

The healthcare workforce in the United Kingdom is comprised mostly of ageing individuals who are retiring in large numbers. As a result, there are more healthcare workers leaving the workforce than there are joining hence causing a shortage of staff. Another cause of the problem is the ageing population where the elderly people outnumber the young people. This means that there are more elderly people seeking healthcare services, which skews the ratio of healthcare workers to patients in favor of the patients. Staff shortage in the UK healthcare sector has also been caused partly by staff burnout. The few healthcare professionals available are overworked and experience burnout, which causes them to look for opportunities in other countries (Duffield and O'Brien-Pallas, 2018). Finally, there is a limited supply of healthcare applicants due to Brexit restrictions that hinder potential workers from EU countries and limited number of qualified applicants in the country.

Effects

One of the effects of the problem of shortage of staff is an increase in patient mortality rate. When healthcare staff are fewer than required to satisfactorily cater to all the patients, the quality of healthcare drops below required standards. As a result, the chances of critically ill patients dying from their diseases increase, hence increasing the mortality rate. Secondly, the problem will have

the effect of poor health outcomes from the healthcare sector. Understaffing in the healthcare sector leads to poor health services, which in turn, lead to poor outcomes such as increased waiting times. The third effect that the problem of understaffing will have concerns high turnover. The few healthcare professionals that work in the sector will deem the working environment to be poor and have low job satisfaction levels. Consequently, they are likely to quit their jobs in order to secure other working opportunities with better working environments. Understaffing in the healthcare sector is also bound to have the effect of increased medical errors (Combes, Elliott, and Skåtun, 2018). As a result of overworking the few healthcare professionals available, they are likely to commit medical errors as they burnout and experience fatigue.

Evaluation of Alternative Solutions

International Recruitment

The NHS can solve the problem of shortage of healthcare workers by opening the vacancies to applicants from different countries and continents. There are international healthcare workers that will be willing to work for the NHS if given the opportunity as it has been proven by applications for the positions from workers from third world countries (Young et al, 2018). The solution will offer the NHS the opportunity to increase the number of healthcare workers within a short period of time thus solving the problem. However, the solution has the disadvantage of populating the NHS with professionals who will require training to align their skills with the regulations and requirements of the NHS.

Increase Training Opportunities

The government can address the problem of shortage of healthcare staff by enabling healthcare training for potential healthcare professionals. The solution can be implemented by subsidizing healthcare training and healthcare training institutions in a bid to attract more students. In the long run, the number of qualified healthcare workers will increase thus solving the problem of shortage of staff. This solution is, however, disadvantageous in the short term as it does not solve the current shortage of staff.

Strategies to Increase Retention Rate

The government and the NHS can solve the problem of shortage of staff by implementing strategies that increase the retention rate of the existing healthcare workers. Currently, one of the causes of shortage of staff has been established to be a high turnover rate. Therefore, the government and the NHS should invest in strategies that will address the high turnover rate such as improving the working environment and easing the legal restrictions for healthcare workers from EU countries.

Improve Healthcare Management

Healthcare management can address the problem of shortage of staff by addressing all the issues that cause lack of staff in the healthcare industry. By managing the workforce effectively, the existing workers will be inclined to remain in their positions thus eliminating the problem of high turnover. Moreover, good healthcare management will ensure the existence of good working environments in the healthcare industry thus encouraging the existing professionals to remain in the sector (Dash et al, 2019). Finally, improving healthcare management at the governmental level will address the problem of shortage of staff by implementing strategies, laws and regulations that will eliminate the huddles of good healthcare. The solution has the main advantage of addressing many of the causes of shortage of staff in healthcare.

Implementing Improved Healthcare Management

Improving healthcare management as a potential solution to the problem of shortage of staff promises the best chance of holistically addressing the problem. Therefore, the report recommends that it be implemented over the other three solutions as it addresses most of the causes of the problem at once. The solution can be implemented firstly by hiring new personnel at the NHS and governmental level to manage healthcare in the country. At the organizational level, the solution can be implemented by ensuring that all management applicants are highly qualified and posses the right experience in healthcare management. Subsequently, the managers should be evaluated on a constant basis with the aim of ensuring they provide competent management at all levels. Such evaluation procedures should be carried out as part of the solution as they will ensure continuous competent healthcare management. The solution can have its effectiveness measured by taking the statistics of the number of staff before and after its implementation. The NHS and other relevant governmental healthcare agencies should track the ration of healthcare workers to that of patients over the period of time that the solution has been implemented. In the event the number of workers increase in relation to the number of patients, then the solution can be rendered effective and vice versa.

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