



Exploring NP Practice and Satisfaction in Primary Care at one Southern California Healthcare Institution

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Abstract

Background: In the United States, as Primary Care physician shortage is predicted to worsen over the next decade, nurse practitioner providers (NPs) play an increasingly important role in providing access to high quality primary care. Little is known, however, about NP satisfaction and how it affects organizational processes and retention.

Aim: This paper is a report of a study done to gain understanding of NP practice environment and NP satisfaction in Primary Care in Southern California.

Methodology/Approach: Data were collected through anonymous survey that was distributed via email to practicing NPs from 5 primary care clinics at one Southern California healthcare institution. Several methods were used such as Likert scale and semantic evaluation scale in evaluating and measuring respondents' opinions on important satisfaction features, as well as open-ended questions to identify and assess underlying constructs that specifically define nurse practitioner satisfaction.

Results: The following key concepts underlying nurse practitioner practice were elucidated: 1. Salary, 2. Growth, 3. Advancement, 4. Time, 5. Flexibility of making own work schedule. Salary, work schedules and flexibility were perceived as the 3 most important factors regarding a need for a change to improve NP retention and attrition. The APCs took pride in their work performance and were overall content with their job and bonus, reimbursement and benefits, but not with their overall compensation package. There was also a trend of discontent with salaries, as these were perceived not only as not competitive, but generally low.

Conclusions and significance: The strongest indicators for nurse practitioner job satisfaction and retention were pay, schedule and time.

Keywords: Nurse Practitioners (NPs); Advanced Practice Clinicians (APCs), Satisfaction; NP practice; Southern California; NP attrition; NP retention; NP satisfaction; NP work environment; intent to stay; Maslow hierarchy of needs

Abbreviations: NP(s): Nurse Practitioner(s); APCs: Advanced Practice Clinician(s)

are Advanced Practice Clinicians (APCs), according to the American Association of Nurse Practitioners: increasingly become the health care provider of choice for millions of Americans, with a scope of practice that covers treatments of illnesses as well as disease prevention. With the primary care physician shortage predicted to worsen

Introduction

In the United States today, nurse practitioners (NPs), who

over the next decade. Nurse practitioner providers (NPs) play an increasingly important role in providing access to high quality primary care. Besides being “a solution to primary care,” NPs provide high quality care for low costs and patients report “extremely high” level of satisfaction [1]. Moreover, in states where NP supervision is mandated, such as in California, it is critical to establish better collaborative models, as healthcare providers struggle to care for the ageing population.

Background and Objectives

The AANP reported several studies. A large study was conducted in 2016 on NP demographics/employment characteristics/practice settings and billing practices. In 2017, studies were done on compensation by region as well as there is a mention of older studies on Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) school tuition done in 2009 [2], as well as, there was a report looking at the trends of increasing the NP workforce [3]. Little is known, however, about NP satisfaction and how it affects organizational processes and attrition/retention. In the past several years, nurse practitioners in San Diego (Southern California) have been increasingly employed to fill positions not just in primary care, but also in the specialty clinics. There has been a gap in the literature, however, regarding their job satisfaction, attrition and retention.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to gain understanding of the NP practice environment and satisfaction in Primary Care at one primary care institution in Southern California. The intent is to elicit NP opinions on important aspects of satisfaction in regards to their work environment and to identify and assess underlying constructs that specifically define nurse practitioner satisfaction. The study results will be used to learn further about the aspects of NP practice that are perceived by NPs as important, as well as to give direction for future research.

Theoretical Framework

The study used the popular Maslow’s [4,5] hierarchy of needs theoretical underpinning that has been utilized in previous research due to its applicability to evaluating satisfaction. The theory suggested that human needs are represented as a hierarchy (Figure 1) consisting of physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization, with the essential needs being the basics, before more complex needs can be met. The Todorova Assessment Tool (TAT) instrument was developed based on this model (See Appendix A).

Survey Instrument

1. I feel valued as an employee.
2. I am satisfied with my physical work environment (office space, computer station, assigned patient rooms, supplies).
3. My job requirements are clear.
4. I receive the training I need to do my job well.
5. The organization shows concern for the safety of its employees.
6. My supervisor cares about me as a person.
7. I feel accepted and am treated with courtesy, listened to, and invited to express my thoughts and feelings by the upper administration.
8. I believe in and take pride in my work and my workplace.
9. The culture and emotional climate of the clinic is generally positive and supportive.
10. My efforts are recognized and acknowledged in tangible ways.
11. I receive constructive feedback in a way that emphasizes positives, rather than negatives.
12. I enjoy a flexible work schedule
13. I am satisfied with my current work schedule.
14. There is a clear path for job advancement.
15. My thoughts and opinions are heard.
16. I have job security.
17. Clinic clearly communicates its goals and strategies to me.
18. My salary reflects my years of experience and qualifications.
19. I am satisfied with my yearly bonus.
20. I am satisfied with the offered benefits.
21. The overall benefits package for Nurse Practitioner are comparable to these of major competitors in San Diego
22. What are the three most important factors that you would like to see changed in your practice? (Select what applies)
23. How satisfied are you with your TMD money received for CMEs and work-related expenses?
24. How likely are you to leave (the organization) within the next year?
25. What would be the reason to leave your job, other than moving?
26. The things I like most about working as a Nurse Practitioner at (this) clinic are:
27. The things that (the organization) should do to make it a better workplace for Nurse Practitioners are:

Appendix A: Todorova Assessment Tool (TAT).

Methods

Data collection

Data were collected through an anonymous online survey that were distributed via email to practicing NPs from 5 primary care clinics at one Southern California healthcare institution. The survey was a 27-item inventory. It was conducted in January 2018. Several methods were used such as Likert scale and semantic evaluation scale in evaluating and measuring respondents’ opinions on important satisfaction features, as well as open-ended questions to identify and assess underlying constructs that specifically define nurse practitioner satisfaction. Participants were asked to answer questions that can be divided into 6 categories: 1.Compensation; 2.Safety and physical environment; 3.Self-esteem and recognition; 4.Flexibility over work schedule; 5.Job security and clear understanding of job duties and advancement path; 6.Likelihood to leave the job, or reasons not to leave.

Participants

Participants were convenience sample of all twenty-nine APCs (n=29) employed by the medical group. No demographic, gender or age questions were asked. Twenty-five (n=25) people answered the results of the survey. The participants were not offered anything in exchange for completing the survey.

Ethical considerations

There was a survey greeting and the APCs were to consent to taking an anonymous survey. No names or other identifying information were linked to the responses. If participants did not consent, they were asked to leave the survey. Participation, therefore, started with agreeing to take the survey and ended after the survey was completed. Additionally, the participants were 18y.o. or older, and willing to participate. No identifiable information, names, addresses, or emails was kept one file. Survey was conducted with the Survey Gizmo platform. Data was encrypted and respondent's IP addresses were not saved. The researcher had the only access to the survey account details in the research record.

Findings

Participants were asked to answer questions that were grouped into 6 categories: Compensation; Safety and physical environment; Self-esteem and recognition; Flexibility over work schedule; Job security and clear understanding of job duties and advancement path; Likelihood to leave the job, or reasons not to leave.

Compensation

Most of the participants (25 of 26 participants) were either unsure (19%) or disagreed (77%) that their salary reflects their experience and qualifications (Figure 1). More than half of the participants (23 out of 26 respondents) were satisfied with their reimbursement for conferences and more than half of the participants (65%) were satisfied with their benefits, while 30% were neutral. More than half (15 out of 26 respondents) disagreed that their overall benefits package was comparable to other major competitors in San Diego. Only yearly bonus 6 out of 26 respondents were satisfied with their bonus.

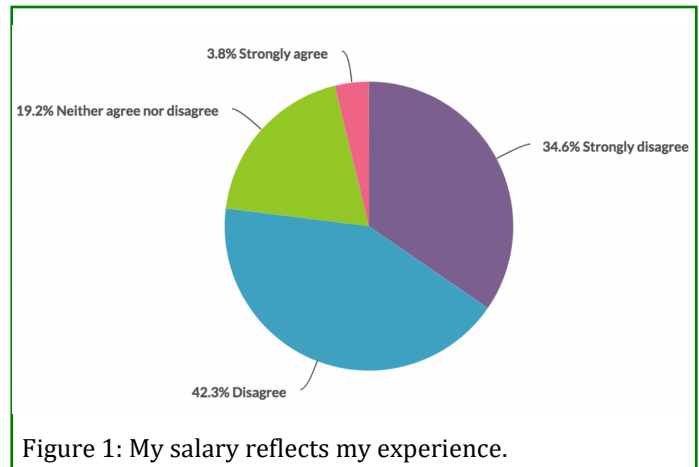


Figure 1: My salary reflects my experience.

Safety and physical environment

More than half of the respondents (14 out of 26) were satisfied with their physical work environment (office space, computer station, assigned patient rooms and supplies), while 4 were neutral and 8 were dissatisfied. The majority of the respondents (20 out of 26) felt that the organization showed concern for the safety of its employees, while 5 respondents remained neutral (Figure 2).

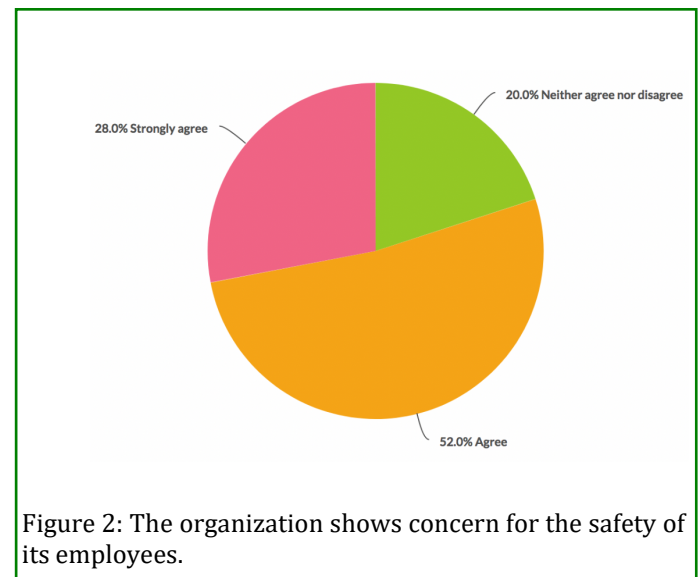
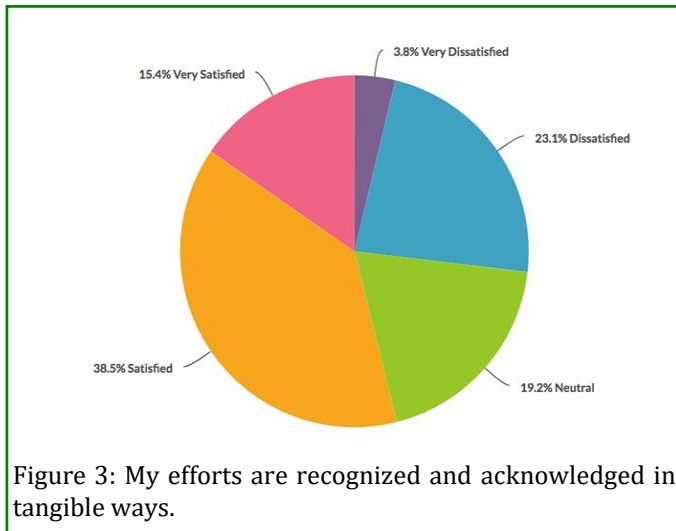


Figure 2: The organization shows concern for the safety of its employees.

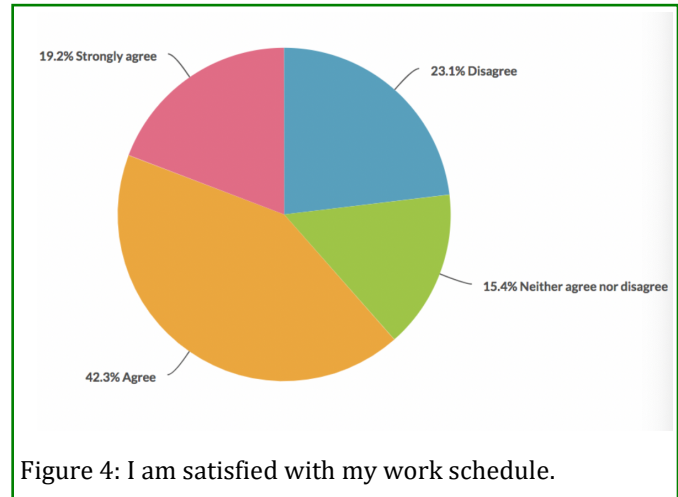
Self-esteem and recognition

Concerning feeling valued as an employee, 3 out of 26 respondents disagreed and 2 were neutral, and the rest (80%) felt valued. The majority of the respondents identified their supervisor (usually a physician) as caring (n=22 out of n=26), 1 respondent disagreed and 3 were neutral. The majority of the respondents (17 out of 26), also felt accepted and treated with courtesy listened to, and invited to express thoughts and feelings by the upper administration. Concerning their workplace, except for 2 neutral responses, 92% (n=24) of the respondents reported believing in and taking pride in their work and their workplace. The culture and emotional climate of the clinic was reported as generally positive and supportive by more than a half of the respondents (n=16), while 8 were neutral, and 2 reported being dissatisfied. About half of the respondents (14 out of 26) felt that their efforts were recognized and acknowledged in tangible ways, 5 were neutral, and 7 were dissatisfied (Figure 3). Lastly, constructive feedback in a way that emphasizes positives, rather than negatives, the majority of the respondents were satisfied (n=17), 9 out of 26 were neutral (34%), and there were no dissatisfied.

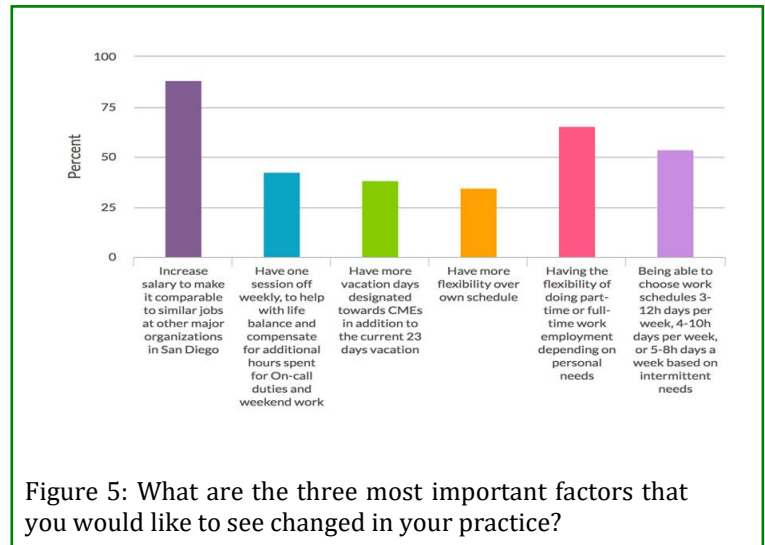


Flexibility over work schedule

17 out of 26 (65%) reported enjoying a flexible work schedule, 5 were neutral, and 1 respondent was dissatisfied. Concerning being satisfied with current work schedule, 16 out of 26 respondents agreed, 4 were neutral, and 10 disagreed (Figure 4).



Concerning the three most important factors that participants wanted to change in their practices, respondents identified as #1 Salary (88.5%), #2 Flexible schedule between part-time and full-time work (65.4%) and #3 Being able to choose work schedules 3-12h days per week, 4-10h days per week, or 5-8h days a week based on intermittent needs (53.8%) (Figure 5).



Job security and clear understanding of job duties and advancement path Interestingly, only about half of the respondent (15 out of 26) indicated that their job requirements were clear (n=15) (Figure 6).

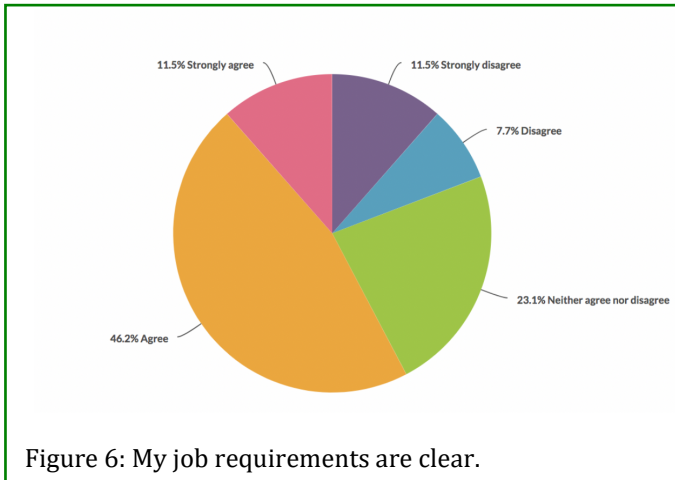


Figure 6: My job requirements are clear.

18 out of 26 (62%) felt that they receive the training they need to do their job well, 4 of 26 were neutral and 3 of 26 disagreed. Concerning whether there is a clear path to advancement, only 4 respondents out of 26 agreed, 10 were neutral and 12 disagreed (Figure 7).

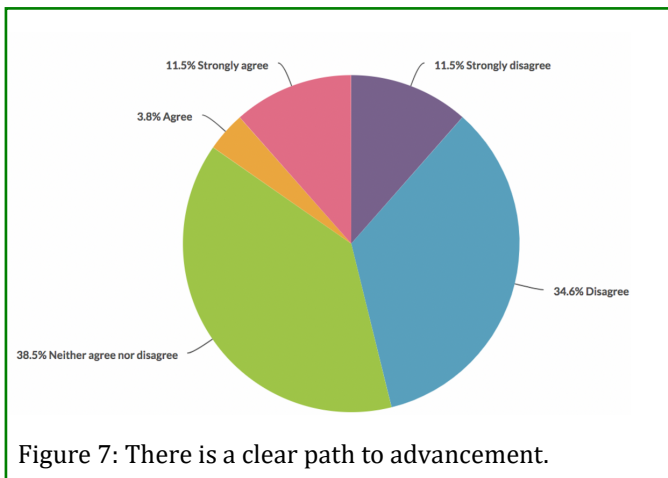


Figure 7: There is a clear path to advancement.

15 out of 26 perceived to have job security, 7 were neutral, and 4 disagreed. Concerning whether the clinic clearly communicates its goals and strategies to the APCs, about half of the respondents agreed, about 9 out of 26 were neutral, and 3 disagreed.

Likelihood to leave the job, or reasons not to leave

When asked about the likelihood likely are you to leave (the organization) within the next year, about 25% reported that they are likely to leave their job (n=7), and about another 25% were neutral (n=7). Less than a half of

the respondents were unlikely to leave the clinic within the next year (n=12) (Figure 8).

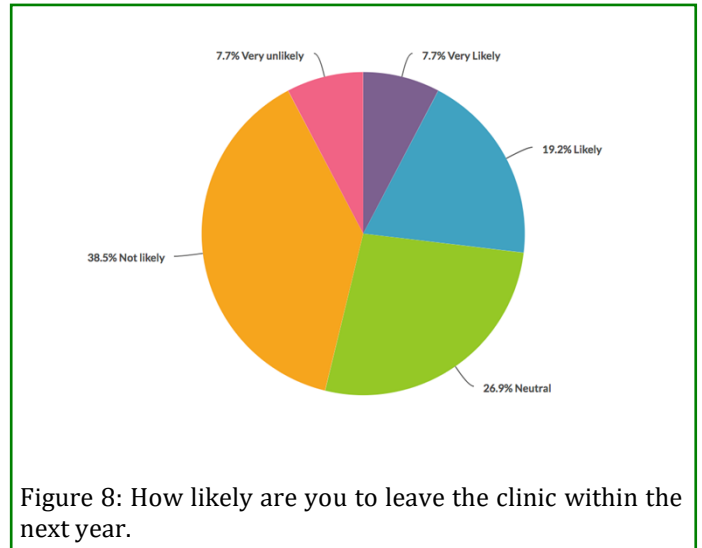


Figure 8: How likely are you to leave the clinic within the next year.

Open-ended questions revealed several constructs for reason to leaving their job, other than moving, from most to least important: Salary, schedule, time flexibility, and other opportunities. What the majority of the respondents liked the most about working as a Nurse Practitioner at (this) clinic from most to least important: The care for the patients, collegial support, and learning from the physicians. To make a better workplace for Nurse Practitioners, the respondents suggested from most to least important: Salary increase at least comparable to other competitors, if not comparable, flexible schedules, add more patient rooms (Figure 9).

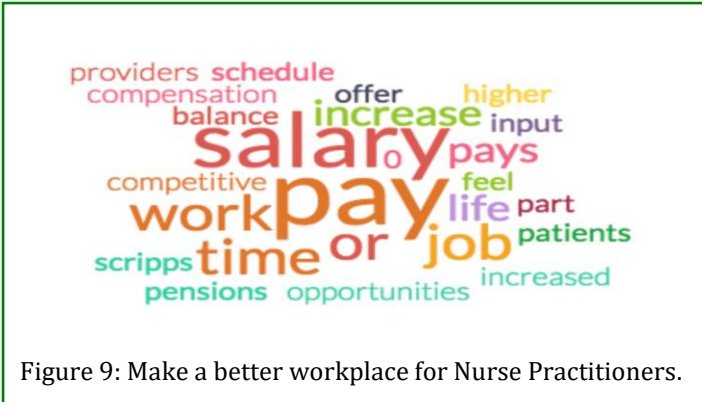


Figure 9: Make a better workplace for Nurse Practitioners.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper adds understanding and knowledge of APCs' attitudes regarding their perceived work environment. The results also indicate certain preferences and

priorities. Salary, work schedules and flexibility were perceived as the 3 most important factors regarding a need for a change to improve retention and attrition. The APCs took pride in their work performance and were overall content with their job and bonus, reimbursement and benefits, but not with their overall compensation package. There was also a trend of discontent with salaries, as these were perceived not only as not competitive, but generally low. This paper adds to the literature the most current state of NP practice, attrition, which appears to be likely high, and retention. Contrary to prior nursing studies that have identified nursing burnout and fatigue, job discontent, poor safety, discontent with collegial environment and lack of patient appreciation, as well as satisfaction with work schedules and flexibility of hours worked [6], this study identified that NPs valued their work and liked the care for the patients the most.

Implication for Practice

Retention strategies for NPs should be implemented. Previous studies reported job satisfaction in Northern California being comparable to that reported by the NPs in Southern California. It will be interesting to see whether the results would be consistent, especially in view of higher salaries in Northern California. Future research should perhaps look at national trends in terms of geographical location and and/or specific employers who have a large number of APCs. Future research should also look specific aspects of NP job satisfaction, attrition and retention that are perceived by NPs as important, depending on their age.

Limitations

A limitation to this study is a small sample size, although the return of surveys was close to 90%. Another limitation is the awareness that the survey results will be provided to the administration to hopefully improve their work situation. Arguably, this may be strength of this study, as well, in terms of helping the representation validity. In spite of these limitations, the findings identified valuable aspects about NP's satisfaction and common constructs emerged from the open-ended questions. The results also give ideas about a future research focus.

Acknowledgement

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