Health Care Provider Recruitment and Retention Millard County, Utah
Ronald T. Draper

Master of Science, Candidate

Utah State University, 2019

Major Professor: Dr. SoJung Lim

Department: Sociology
Abstract

Millard County, Utah, with its remote location and sparse population, has experienced recurring problems recruiting and retaining primary health care providers. Though widely recognized, this problem has not been systematically and rigorously studied. This research addressed this need by collecting and analyzing the data gleaned from a series of semi-structured interviews with nineteen (nine current and ten former) of the twenty-four known providers who established practice in the county from the 1980s to 2018. The analytic data of this study also included four administrators who were involved in the recruitment process.
This high participation percentage was one of its important strengths as it provided the ability to more thoroughly discovery the root causes underlying these short-comings. One important finding of this study is that is not a single reason or even a handful of factors underlying recruitment and retention failures, but rather, when the cumulative effect of a variety of negative experiences finally reaches a tipping point, the provider feels compelled to terminate his/her in-county health care services. This conclusion is supported by data that showed providers who were not provided with on-going support, such as building their practice or having access to loan repayment, still chose to leave practice in the county, in spite of their positive rural background.
Findings of this study suggest that a comprehensive and on-going effort is necessary for the successful recruitment and retention of health care providers; for example, my results identified several factors that attracted and kept health care providers to rural Utah including appropriate provider selection, family engagement, loan forgiveness, and a clear, fair, and fully implemented compensation package. It is also imperative to continually assess stressors impinging on primary care providers and effectively dealing with them before the tipping point is reached.
Study Demographics
Providers

Potential Participation vs. Actual Participation

- **Non-Participating**: 5
- **Participating**: 19

Number
Study Demographics
Former Providers
Participation vs. Non-Participation

- **NON-PARTICIPATION: UNABLE TO LOCATE** 7
- **NON-PARTICIPATION: NON-RESPONSE** 7
- **NON-PARTICIPATION: DECLINE** 7
- **NON-PARTICIPATION: DEATH** 13
- **PARTICIPATION** 67

Percent
**Recruitment Experiences**
*Former vs. Current Providers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment Factors</th>
<th>Former Provider</th>
<th>Current Provider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provider had rural background</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family rural background</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family supportive of rural life style</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned to go rural</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct to Millard County from training</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loan forgiveness instrumental in practice location</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received loan forgiveness</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruited actively</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received help or guarantees with start of practice</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought residency or training with rural focus</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training provided needed skills</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought enhanced rural training</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes Answers (Overall Percent)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Major Challenges Reported
Former vs. Current Providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes Answers (Overall Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ER call a challenge when added to other expectations</td>
<td>Former Provider: 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations did not match experience</td>
<td>Former Provider: 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loan forgiveness not available or reduced early</td>
<td>Former Provider: 40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percents

- ER call a challenge when added to other expectations
- Expectations did not match experience
- Loan forgiveness not available or reduced early
- Yes Answers (Overall Percent)
Positive Factors Reported
Former vs. Current Providers

1. **Work Balance Satisfactory**: 30% (Former Provider), 89% (Current Provider)
2. **Felt Satisfied with Preparation for Rural Medicine**: 40% (Former Provider), 89% (Current Provider)
3. **Expectations Matched Actual**: 40% (Former Provider), 89% (Current Provider)
4. **Family Adapted to Rural Area**: 60% (Former Provider), 89% (Current Provider)
5. **Compensated Fairly**: 70% (Former Provider), 78% (Current Provider)
6. **Treated Fairly by Organization**: 50% (Former Provider), 78% (Current Provider)
7. **Additional Clinics Provided Alternatives to Leaving**: 10% (Former Provider), 33% (Current Provider)
Factors Driving Former Provider's Decision to Leave

- **LEFT BECAUSE FINISHED LOAN REPAYMENT OBLIGATION**: 11%
- **FINANCIAL INCLUDING LOAN FORGIVENESS ISSUES**: 44%
- **DISSATISFACTION WITH BREADTH OF WORK REQUIRED**: 33%
- **SENIOR PARTNERS DISSATISFACTION WITH NEWER PROVIDER**: 44%
- **POSITION ADVANCEMENTS COMMITMENTS NOT KEPT**: 44%
- **SENIOR PROVIDERS NOT HELPING ENOUGH TO BUILD THEIR PRACTICE**: 33%
- **TRAINING PROGRAM DID NOT PROVIDE ALL SKILLS NEEDED**: 33%
- **EXCESSIVE CALL BURDEN AND/OR TOO FEW CLINIC PATIENTS**: 33%
- **FAMILY DID NOT LIKE RURAL SETTING**: 33%
- **TIME AWAY FROM FAMILY A BURDEN**: 56%
- **NEW PROVIDER NOT ACCEPTED AS AN EQUAL OR RESPECTED**: 67%
- **WORK LOAD EXCESSIVE**: 56%
- **COMBINED EXPECTATIONS EXCESSIVE, INCLUDING ER CALL**: 56%
Conclusions

• Robust study, very high participation rate.
• Current and former providers expressed candidly opinions.
• Previous literature identifies typically that factors in successful recruitment include: Rural background, training provides rural exposure, family satisfaction and support issues, loan forgiveness, financial incentives.
• Current study found that most had rural background and exposure, families typically wanted to be rural. Lack of loan forgiveness was a negative.
Conclusions

• This was a qualitative study. Further studies may be helpful to quantify further the issues.

• Major finding: The large gap between expectations and actual experiences present more commonly in former providers than in current providers.

  Issues:
  • Lack of support, respect, advancement opportunities, and help in building practice were major reasons for providers leaving.
  • Few, 10%, cited family dissatisfaction as reason for leaving.
  • Few, 10%, left after loan forgiveness obligation completed.

• Recommendations:
  • Comprehensive retention program that addresses individual needs and concerns before cumulative effect leads provider to “tipping point” that drives decision to leave. Individual issues are key.