The health industry has emerged as one of the most challenging sectors as well as one of the largest service sector industries in India with estimated revenue of US$35 billion; it constitutes 5.2% of India’s GDP and employs 4 million people. The Indian health industry is expected to grow at 15% per annum to US$78.6, reaching 6.1% of GDP and employing 9 million people by 2012.

Recognizing the significant potential and challenges in the health sector, the government has prioritized it in the Eleventh Five Year Plan. The private sector plays a significant role by contributing 4.3% of GDP and 80% share of healthcare provision. However, deficiencies persist with respect to access, affordability, efficiency, quality and effectiveness, despite the high level of overall private and public expenditure on health.

In order to be comparable with the healthcare parameters of other developing countries, India’s healthcare sector faces many challenges. For example, to reach a ratio of two beds per 1000 population by 2025, an additional 177 billion beds will be required which will need a total investment of US$86 billion.

There is an acute shortage of doctors, nurses, technicians and healthcare administrators and an additional 0.7 million doctors are needed to reach a doctor population ratio of 1:1000 by 2025. Although the health insurance sector is projected to grow to US$3.8 billion in collected premiums by 2012 from the annual collected premium of US$711 million in 2006, there is a dismal health insurance penetration rate; at present only 2% of the total population is insured.

Nurses form the backbone of any medical services or patient care in the health sector. But in India, this important section of workers are highly exploited, with lack of respect and dignity at workplaces and more importantly paid extremely low salaries with lack of job security. It is in this context that nurses across the country should unite and confront the hospital management and the government on these issues.

Many nurses, who mainly come from poor backgrounds, have to pay lakhs of rupees to get a nursing degree and hence have to take huge loans thus leaving them indebted. But after graduation, what really confronts them is lack of opportunity in
government run hospitals. Despite shortage of nurses and other staff in government run hospitals, the government deliberately follows a totally unscientific method of recruitment which keeps the majority of aspirants from getting a post in the government services and at the same time recruits nurses on a contract labour at extremely low wages to fill some of the gaps.

In the private sector, the nurses are confronted with extremely low paying jobs (between Rs: 3000 – Rs. 4000 a month) as against the labour standard of around Rs: 6000 (which is also pathetically low). Even the most experienced ones only get paid about Rs: 8000 – Rs: 9000. Many have to sign a 2-3 year bonded contract that inevitably binds the nurses to the hospital and breaking the contract often entails shelling out Rs: 50,000 – Rs: 100,000 for obtaining their release. Otherwise, all their certificates are held by the hospital management.

Most of the nurses are forced to work beyond the mandatory 8 hours working day, to more than 10 to 11 hours. Apart from low wages, none of the nurses are given employment benefits like Provident Fund (PF) and gratuity. The nurses are not even given health coverage despite facing higher risk of infections.

Another aspect that does not find much of a mention anywhere is the human rights violation in the form of sexual harassment to female nurses. There is also the lack of work place ethics and respect for the nurse profession, with harassment by either doctors or the management by constantly accusing them of dereliction of duty. With the labour department and government neglecting the problems faced by the nurses and lack of unions fighting for the nurse’s cause, many are forced to silently bare these injustices.

More the problems, More the dissatisfaction; more will be the scope for attrition and hence, more is the scope for research.

This research tries to explain the elements that are causing either satisfaction or dissatisfaction amongst nurses working in private hospitals in Madurai region.

This reason tries to identify the reasons for attrition and suggests some strategies for retention of Nurses in private hospitals in Madurai Region.

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