
CHAPTER 6

SUGGESTIONS

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Chapter Overview:

This chapter puts forth suggestions based on findings derived from the research study. Suggestions to hospitals are made to reduce intrusion from work and extend more support so as to improve work life balance and job satisfaction of doctors. To help improve the present scenario specific, suitable and feasible work life balance programs have also been recommended. Also, precautions that hospitals need to take before initiating any of these programs are discussed. Finally, the chapter closes by providing a strong case and rationale for hospitals to adopt these programs.

A) Strategies to cope with Doctors' Work Life Balance:

There is no debate to the fact that in present Indian healthcare system, hospital's productivity, quality of patient care and patient satisfaction all depend upon healthcare professionals' performance and dedication towards their duty. Based on the findings of this comprehensive survey on Doctors' Work Life Balance and its effect on their job satisfaction, certain suggestions have been given to resolve the work life issues of doctors.

6.1) What can Doctors do?

Doctors must realise that having work life balance is important to them and if not achieved, its consequences on professional and personal lives can be enormous. Though difficult, it can be attained by setting certain guidelines and making some small changes.

- ▶ Doctors need to assess their priorities regularly and accordingly set balanced goals in life. It must be realized that achieving everything is not possible; some tough decisions must be taken to manage a balanced professional and personal life.

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- ▶ Maintain healthy routine. Regardless of hectic schedule, avoid skipping on food. Take special care of personal health during stressful times, by setting time aside for sleep, exercise and recreation.
 - ▶ Assess daily work schedule to identify and eliminate stressors and activities that consume unnecessary time and energy.
 - ▶ Take regular short breaks whenever possible throughout the day. It is important not to discuss about patients during this rest periods but to relax and relieve stress.
 - ▶ Doctors also have a tendency and pressure to be perfectionists, which makes it difficult for them to seek help. But doctors must understand that there is nothing wrong in asking for support and help from mentors, seniors or colleagues. Also having supporting family and friends can help release lot of tension and stress.

6.2) What can Patients do?

Doctors always expect to be valued and appreciated by their patients. In case of present research, doctors were disappointed with increasing levels of mistrust and expectation among patients and their relatives. Hence they experienced huge pressure to be self critical and be a 'doctor of good choice'. To reduce this dysfunctional pressure on doctors it is suggested that:

- ▶ Patients change their attitude towards doctors; which will come only through more medical knowledge and awareness.
- ▶ Indian patients, in general are recommended to develop the habit of regular health and medical checkups. Hospitals and government must encourage and provide for free checkups, which will reduce the percentage of emergency cases; that put additional demands on doctors.
- ▶ Effective doctor-patient communication is vital and a solution to the problem of increasing mistrust in this relationship



6.3) What can Hospitals do?

6.3.1) Create more Supportive Culture at Hospitals:

- ▶ In order to maintain an effective, productive and mentally healthy workforce, hospitals should create an atmosphere that will enable healthcare professionals to actualize their full potential. Hospitals' work culture must be transformed to be more supportive and accommodating of doctors' personal and family needs. A positive Work Life Balance thinking culture is vital.
- ▶ Hospitals must realize that productivity and quality of care provided by doctors matters more than simply hours put in by them in hospitals. In India, working long hours is becoming addictive. A change of attitude is required at individual and organizational level to overcome the myth 'long working hours means better performance'.
- ▶ Support from seniors was found to be lacking and thus hospitals must train their senior and in-charge doctors to be more flexible, supportive and family friendly managers and mentors, who can help junior doctors to deal with their WLB issues. Management and seniors need to be sensitive to the problems faced by doctors at work and at home.
- ▶ Cooperation and support from colleagues was found to be helpful in dealing with work pressure and stress. Thus hospitals can form peer support groups and train them in team building and development activities, which will further improve the bonding and relationships among doctors.
- ▶ Adopt work life balance support programs and policies as recommended below in this chapter. However, simply initiating these programs will not guarantee WLB, rather doctors and their in-charges must be encouraged and trained in using these.
- ▶ Many of the doctors reported lack of time to take care of personal health and wellness. To tackle this issue, hospitals can initiate onsite wellness programs as

recommended below in this chapter. In addition to this, hospitals may also provide doctors with canteen facilities within premises that offer nutritious and healthier food options.

- ▶ To compensate for deprived family and social lives that doctors complained about, hospitals can organise family together, festivals or other social activities, which will allow doctors to spend some relaxing time with family and friends. Moreover such activities will also function as stress busters.
- ▶ Further, doctors from Mumbai city were found to face greater work life issues due to specific challenges added by metropolitan lifestyle. Hospitals in this city are thus recommended to pay special to these specific needs of their doctors and to extend maximum support possible.
- ▶ Doctors also experienced stress and pressure while dealing with patients and their relatives. To minimize this, hospitals are suggested to focus on and encourage 'doctor-patient communication'. This will help educate patients and avoid lot of misunderstandings later. The importance of doctor patient communication has been undermined in India and is not a common practice.

6.3.2) Redesign Work Routine and Workload of Doctors:

- ▶ The issue of workload is at the center of work life balance problems of doctors. The causes for unrealistic work demands and overtime of doctors must be examined so as to reduce total amount of time doctors spend on their job. For this, hospitals are suggested to undertake HR activities related to doctors' job descriptions and work-load measurement, analysis and management.
- ▶ Hospitals, policy reformers and government need to examine and redesign certain norms related to doctors' duties and responsibilities. Standardized and stringent norms for duty hours, need to be regularized in public and private hospitals

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- ▶ Hospitals are suggested to focus more on redesigning intrinsic factors inbuilt in a doctor's job, particularly because these factors were observed to have greater influence on doctors' work life balance.
 - ▶ In no case, doctors should be allowed to work more than 24 consecutive hours. Even when shift change takes place, care must be taken that doctors get a rest period of ten to twelve hours between shifts. Reducing excessive long hours of work and double shifts so as to have reasonable work time is the bottom line.
 - ▶ It is also necessary to provide sufficient short breaks at regular intervals throughout the day. Apart from lunch break some leisure time must be set aside wherein each doctor can rest and relax. Some sort of stress relieving activity can also be conducted during this period which will help doctors overcome the physical and emotional exhaustion. Incorporating rest zones or areas can be arranged with recreational facilities can be a good initiative.
 - ▶ Providing days off in lieu of overtime pay can be considered for doctors who need time to fulfill their personal and family responsibilities

6.3.3) Provide a sense of Control:

Initiatives to provide sense of control and empowerment to doctors are suggested.

- ▶ As doctors are required to work rotating shifts, thus hospitals must provide better autonomy and flexibility to doctors to at least choose their shift duty. The practice of self-scheduling, self-rostering or request-driven rostering will allow doctors more freedom and control over their time they spent on job.
- ▶ Doctors' flexibility and ability to take leave and time off from job to attend to personal and family obligations must be increased. Allow greater access to avail single day leave, short service leave or annual leave without the feeling of guilt.

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- ▶ Indian hospitals are often under-funded and under staffed, in particular public hospitals. Doctors were forced to do work where doctor specific skills were not required, due to shortage of nurses and paramedics. Hence employing more medical assistants and nurses or using technology support may provide doctors more control over their core work.

6.3.4) Implement Work Life Balance Programs in Hospitals

Hospitals have been suggested to implement Work Life Balance Programs (WLBP) taking in to account two things, first strong preference for these programs by doctors from public and private hospitals of Nashik and Mumbai cities and second a review of work life programs successfully implemented by hospitals outside India.

Given the evidence from this research, that supportive work environment not only helps improve doctors work life balance but also their affective job satisfaction, hospitals can take initiative towards designing and implementing these WLBP:

1) Concierge Services:

Concierge services were the most highly preferred program by doctors from both the cities. Hospitals may thus, surely initiate implementing WLBP by offering concierge services. These services can provide huge relief and support to those doctors who, due to their busy schedules find it difficult to handle daily chores of life single handedly.

Concierge service providers have come up in many of the metropolitan cities of India that provide a range of services like home improvements, relocation, tour and travel, ticket bookings, bill payment, shopping assistance and many more.

Hospitals can nevertheless tie up with such service providers available in the city. Private hospitals may even think initiate provision of such services that sound feasible and practical based on needs of their doctors and hospitals.

2) Flexible Work arrangements:

Because doctors perceived total hours of work, authority, control, autonomy and flexibility on the job to be highly interfering with their WLB, it is possible that flexible work arrangements and options will be greatly appreciated by doctors. FWAs were also the second most highly preferred WLBP. These work arrangements can allow doctors more control over their time and work, thereby help manage multiple responsibilities simultaneously. Flexible work arrangements suggested for doctors are:

Temporary reduced hours of shift and work:

This arrangement enables doctors to work reduced number of hours per day only for some specific time period, so as to take care of emergencies arising in personal and family life. Work and life demands keep changing over time; which puts additional or unexpected responsibilities on doctors. This work arrangement can be helpful for doctors to handle such obligations arising out of changing circumstances.

Compressed week hours:

It is an arrangement to work longer shifts each day so as to compress total week days worked into five longer days. With this arrangement doctors can have other days of the week to handle their personal and family responsibilities.

Job sharing:

It is a flexible work option in which two employees share the role and responsibilities a single job, wherein one employee can work few days of the week while the other can work remaining days, with both working together on certain specific day so as update each other. This arrangement can be best suited to doctors who wish to work part time or on consulting basis.

3) Employee Support/ Assistance Schemes

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are voluntary provided programs offered by most hospitals in western countries. These programs offer services to employees as well as their family members, in areas like personal, health and family issues, work relationship issues, job stress, professional counseling on confidential basis, advice on long term illness and many more such services some of which are available round the clock. Out the EAP options made available to doctors surveyed in this research, following were most highly preferred:

- assistance and guidance for financial and investment planning and legal problems
- counseling and stress management programs for emotional or behavioral difficulties faced due to traumatic experiences

EAPs can prove to be of enormous assistance to doctors those who are stressed out with day to day to challenges at hospitals and home.

4) Leave Arrangement:

- Paid Time Off (PTO): an arrangement where a fix amount of off time could be earned after having worked for certain total hours or based on years of service put in.
- Paid forced holidays and vacations: Doctors also approved of forced holidays and vacation arrangement wherein after completion of certain amount of work hours over the months, a doctor is forced to compulsory avail leave or holiday.
- Paternity Leave: In India there isn't any law that indoctrinates the private sector to make paternity leave obligatory. Doctors from both cities had shown keen interest in paternity leave, hence hospitals are suggested to test this option.

5) On-site Program:

- Many of the doctors complained about lack of time to take care of their own physical and mental health. Provision of facilities like onsite fitness, health and yoga centers may help to overcome this complain of doctors.
- Being in a profession that witnesses pain, suffering and death; programs on wellness and spirituality at workplace will be of enormous support to doctors.

*What care hospitals need to take before implementing Work Life Balance Programs?*

In order to maximize the potential of Work Life Balance Programs, there is need to carefully examine suitability of these programs within Indian context. Thus hospitals need to carefully understand and answer the following before undertaking WLB interventions:

1. Why these programs are being developed and what doctors want out of it?

This will be reflected in the way hospital functions, its working culture and environment. Before making any changes, hospitals are suggested to open dialogue and communication with doctors to know what they think and identify their needs and issues related to work life balance. Conducting a work life survey, will provide a number of valuable insights for hospitals.

2. Given the above, what are the most feasible and suitable WLBP?

Adopting any work life balance programs without assessing its fit with the hospital's culture and doctors' need could add to hospital's cost. As doctor's job demands are peculiar and different from other professions, hospitals need to identify most appropriate WLBP that will match not only doctor's needs but also that of hospitals.

Further, how these programs will impact hospital's other policies and work of other healthcare employees must also be considered.

3. How will these policies and programs be implemented and monitored?

Hospitals must be aware of potential problems of introducing new forms of working. To implement these programs hospitals will have to frame appropriate guidelines, employee eligibility criteria, record systems and many such things for each WLBP. Further regular monitoring of these policies will be required to ensure its effectiveness. To evaluate effectiveness of these programs, apart from other feedback measures; DrWLB questionnaire designed by this study can be used to compare the WLB status of doctors before and after implementation of these programs.

Why should Indian hospitals adopt Work Life Balance Programs?

When work and life demands increase or become incompatible with each other, doctors need additional support and resources to deal with it.

- Doctors' work life balance highly matters in healthcare practicing environment, not only for doctors but also for hospitals because it affects quality of patient care. Continued and unattended problems of doctors can not only pose a potential risk to them but also to patient. Hence, it is hospitals responsibility to provide healthcare employees with support and opportunities to manage and balance their lives.

- Increasingly, hospitals in western countries are becoming more aware of healthcare employees' demand for work life balance and have taken greater interest in implementing work life balance programs. A significant indicator of this is the growing number of work life balance strategies, programs and policies being adopted by hospitals in USA, UK and Australia. However, most Indian hospitals are far from this reality.

□ Moreover adoption of WLBP will help to address, to some extent; the problems identified by this research

- Help deal with shortage of doctors in Indian healthcare system:

To overcome this problem, it is crucial to transform the doctors' profession and job into a more satisfactory and rewarding one. Implementations of work life balance programs can help make doctors' job more satisfactory which will show results in two ways. First, it will improve doctors' affection and attachment towards job and provide them a reason to continue with their hospital and stay committed. Secondly, it will improve the image of the profession and also make it an attractive career option for the youth of the country.

- Assist doctors to handle increasing contemporary demands and needs of personal and family lives, in addition to over challenging job

Implementation of life and family friendly programs will allow doctors to face multiple challenges arising due to changing Indian lifestyle and demographics. It will make doctors feel that their jobs are better integrated into their lives and identity and that they can have a personal and family life while also having a job. More over doctors will come to believe that they are not missing out on life just because their jobs are demanding.

- Provide some solution to increasing health and wellbeing concerns among doctors:

The suggested work life balance programs will allow doctors the time needed to take care of their overall health and wellbeing, which presently they are unable to do. Thus supporting doctors to live a balanced and satisfactory life will have positive effect on their psychological, mental and physical health.

To conclude, it can be said that initiative for WLB programs in Indian hospitals is in

its infancy and the demand for such programs is poised to grow undoubtedly in coming future. It must be remembered that WLB Programs must not address only doctors' problems but must also contribute to hospital's objectives. When Work Life Balance Programs are embedded in the mainstream strategy and are integral part of hospital policies; it can become the mechanism to retain talented doctors. For WLB programs to succeed a paradigm shift in thinking process is required, with fundamental changes in work structure.

B) Strategies to Improve Doctors Overall Satisfaction with Job and Life

- ▶ Hospital's culture, policies and practices must be supportive and accommodative of doctors' professional and personal needs.
- ▶ To provide better job satisfaction, hospitals are recommended to evaluate and measure job satisfaction of employees. There is need to conduct to employee satisfaction survey annually, identify improvement areas and take timely corrective actions.
- ▶ Hospitals and government regulatory agencies mainly need to ensure that salary paid to doctors is commensurate with the kind of work they are doing. Considering the continuous risk, stress and tension involved in long hours of work, salary paid to doctors must be justifiable.
- ▶ Doctors need to be provided with more authority, control, autonomy and flexibility within their work boundary.
- ▶ By the very nature of their work, doctors often have profound, moving and disturbing experiences. Prolonged exposure to these experiences will have negative effect on doctors' personal growth and productivity. Hospitals are recommended to implement remedial programs which will help doctors overcome negative emotions and feelings.

- ▶ As patient population is on rise, it is imperative for hospitals and government to take every measure to improve doctor-patient ratio in India.

Conclusion:

Despite rapid intensification of career aspiration and orientation among Indians, both men and women in India still attach a lot of importance to their family and social lives. Indians even consider it to be their moral obligation to fulfill their responsibilities towards family, other dependents and society. Doctors are no exception to this. Thus hospitals in India need to realize this and support their healthcare employees in fulfilling personal responsibilities; ignorance of which can come at a high cost.