

Title: Job satisfaction among physicians providing health care to the elderly: A qualitative study

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ABSTRACT

Physicians job satisfaction plays an important role in the service delivery. Japan is a country with higher number of elderly people and their medical care is a crucial issue. Till date, no study has been conducted on job satisfaction of geriatrician serving the elderly in Japan. This study aims to explore the job satisfaction and motivation of the geriatricians working at different hospitals in Japan. In depth interview of 26 geriatric physician was conducted and data were coded and analyzed. Qualitative content analysis was conducted to identify the response themes. Three major themes emerged from the analysis and they are: satisfaction as a primary care provider, career development and suitable communication with patients. Geriatricians enjoy their work with inter professional collaboration and are satisfied to provide primary health care to the elderly people. Geriatrics is a very promising career to them and they enjoy the communication and empathetic doctor patient relationship in their service.

INTRODUCTION

Japan is a highly super aging country. It is predicted that there will be approximately 39 million people aged ≥ 65 years by the year 2042 (1). By the year 2025, the baby boomer generation, who were born between 1947 to 1949 will be aged ≥ 75 . This will have a tremendous impact on the health care service for the elderly in the country. For the proper care of senior citizens, sufficient health workforce is essential. Alarming, burnout of long term care physicians has been reported in many parts of the globe (2).

Job satisfaction is an important factor contributing to the motivation and enthusiasm of care providers. Several studies have explored the job satisfaction of physicians from different disciplines using quantitative surveys (3-6). A scoping analysis of different aspects of job satisfaction of physicians engaged in primary care revealed that working environment, inter-professional relationship, financial incentives, duration and load of work, relation with patients, etc. plays important role in job satisfaction (7). Some studies explored the gender and ageism in job satisfaction. Females, young and older physicians were more satisfied with their job responsibilities than the counterparts (8). A study in China reported that the older physicians with longer experience, higher degree and professional position are less satisfied with their jobs. Among the influential factors, working environment and management system were mostly highlighted (9). Similar study in Pakistan showed that the physicians are satisfied with their jobs and most dissatisfactions are around salary structure, working environment and patient communication (10). The job satisfaction among elderly care providers is not much explored. A study conducted in rural area of Florida identified the dissatisfaction of physicians who are overburdened with number of patients (11).

In Japan, a couple of studies have explored the job satisfaction of physicians and health care providers. A study conducted among Japanese nursing professionals reported professional autonomy, good working environment, good relationship with supervisors and inter-professional collaboration makes them more satisfied with work (12). Another study among Japanese home visit workers explored that proper communication between care receiver and providers creates a conducive and satisfactory environment (13). However, some studies also argued the association between job satisfaction of physicians and quality of care. Utsugi-Ozaki et al didn't find any significant association between these two phenomenon (14). To our knowledge, there is no study exploring the job satisfaction among elderly care provider in Japan. Therefore, we aimed to identify the factors related and contributing to the job satisfaction of physicians providing care to the elderly people both in urban and rural areas of Japan.

METHODS

A qualitative research was designed to explore the job satisfaction of physicians engaged in elderly care. In depth interviews were conducted to the physicians using interview guide between March to November, 2019.

Data collection site: Data were collected in several cities of Japan including Nagoya, Abashiri, Akita, Iga, Tokushima and Asakura. Both urban and peripheral (rural) doctors were the participants of the interviews.

Individual in-depth interviews: Total 23 respondents were interviewed among them twelve doctors serving the elderly in Nagoya, Aichi and eleven doctors from other cities. Participants were selected purposively for conducting the in depth interviews. Geriatricians were based on Aichi prefecture (Nagoya city), Hokkaido (Abashiri city), Fukuoka (Asakura city), Akita, Mie

(Iga city) and Tokushima. Majority of the participants were elderly and only a few were in early stage of their career. Characteristics of the participants has been demonstrated in Table 1. An interview guide was prepared based on available literatures on job satisfaction of geriatricians. Interviews were carried out at the working places of the respondents. Total duration of each interview was around 45 minutes. Participants were asked about the basic differences of job responsibilities from other departments, motivation of physicians to be engaged in elderly care and about the sense of rewarding.

Table 1: Characteristics of in depth interview participants (n=23)

Participant No	Gender	Age	Region	Profession	Clinic/ Hospital
1	Male	50	Hokkaido	Respiratory medicine	Hospital
2	Male	57	Akita	Digestive surgery	Hospital
3	Male	40 (Early 40s)	Akita	Psychiatry	Hospital
4	Male	45	Akita	Digestive surgery	Clinic
5	Male	30 (Late 30s)	Aichi	Geriatrics	Hospital
6	Male	48	Aichi	Geriatrics	Clinic
7	Male	30 (Late 30s)	Aichi	Geriatrics	Hospital
8	Male	40 (Late 40s)	Aichi	Gerontology	Hospital
9	Male	61	Aichi	Internal medicine	Hospital
10	Female	50 (Early 50s)	Aichi	Cardiology	Hospital
11	Male	60	Aichi	Geriatrics	Hospital
12	Female	41	Aichi	Geriatrics	Hospital
13	Male	48 (Late 40s)	Aichi	Geriatrics	Hospital
14	Female	30 (Early 30s)	Aichi	Cardiology	Hospital
15	Male	38 (Late 30s)	Aichi	Emergency department	Hospital
16	Male	38 (late 30s)	Aichi	Internal Medicine	Hospital
17	Male	56	Mie	Gastroenterology	Clinic
18	Male	54	Mie	Cardiology	Clinic
19	Male	56	Tokushima	Orthopedics	Clinic
20	Male	60s	Tokushima	Gastroenterology	Clinic
21	Male	60s	Tokushima	Respiratory medicine	Clinic
22	Male	60s	Fukuoka	Radiology	Clinic
23	Male	58 (Late 50s)	Fukuoka	Gastroenterology	Clinic

Data analysis: Transcription of all the interviews were conducted word by word. Analysis of the transcript codes were conducted. The ideas emerged from the interviews were systematically identified using qualitative content analysis. Several readings of the transcript familiarize the coders with the overall themes evolved from the data. Data were arranged and total 195 logical units were extracted from all the interviews. Semantic units were then grouped based on the similarity of meanings. Each group was provided a new code as a theme. This process was repeated several times until conceptualizing the final categories and themes.

Validation: The interviewees were informed about the findings at different stages to make sure the accuracy of interpretations. A consensus was made after discussion among the authors in case of any disputes regarding the coding of the emerged themes.

Ethical consideration: This study was approved by the Bioethics Review Committee of Nagoya University School of Medicine prior to the investigation. Written and verbal informed consents were obtained from participants. Interviews of physicians were conducted privately, and participants' transcripts were anonymized.

RESULTS

Themes emerged from the analysis: Major identified themes were primary care, career development and communication. Table 2 describes the themes and sub themes evolved from the analysis.

Table 2: Theme, subtheme and semantic units of codes of job satisfaction for geriatricians

Theme	Subtheme	Representative meaning units
Primary care	Satisfaction of providing primary care	I provide primary care for elderly

	Gratitude of multi professional collaboration	Working with multi-professional collaboration is exciting
	Sense of accomplishment	We can improve the medical care system
Career development	Work life balance	Career in geriatrics helped me in work life balancing
	Doctor's quality of life (appreciation)	Geriatricians are doing precious work
Communication	Empathetic to patients	Geriatricians treat everyone as a human being
	Pride of kindness	One needs to be kind while treating elderly

Primary care provider: Geriatricians provide all sorts of care to the elderly people. It is an opportunity to provide a comprehensive care to the senior citizens where multi professional collaboration is an integral part. Often the service requires multi-disciplinary approaches which supplements each other. Not only providing care to the individual patients, geriatricians feel for the overall improvement of the health care systems for the elderly.

“It is interesting to serve the elderly from the perspective of primary care”

(Gastroenterologist/Internal Medicine, 45 years old, male, Fukuoka)

“One of the interesting things about geriatric medicine is the challenge of decision making.

Physicians think regarding the best medical treatment for each patient, though there is no absolute correct option.” (Respiratory medicine physician, 50 years old, male, Hokkaido)

“It is the job of the geriatrician to help the person live happily until the end.”

(Gastroenterological surgeon, 45 years old, male, Akita)

“It is exciting to work together in a multi-professional environment and supplement each other.”

(Geriatrician, 48 years old, male, Aichi)

“It is interesting to be involved in all departments from the perspective of primary care.”

(Gastroenterologist/Internal Medicine, 45 years old, male, Fukuoka)

“I would like to improve the medical care for the elderly in Japan.” (Geriatrician, 31 years old, male, Aichi)

The challenge of treating elderly people with multiple dysfunction is often challenging and geriatricians love to accept that challenge. Providing symptomatic treatment to make the patient comfortable often needs engagement of different disciplines. Thus geriatricians serve the elderly patients to live happily until their end of life.

Career development: Serving the elderly people provides an opportunity to the physicians to be appraised by patients and family members which in turn acts as an indicator of better quality of life. Also, some physicians reported about maintain a work life balance between career and family life as because of the pattern of service delivery to the geriatric patients. Because of increasing number of elderly patients, geriatrics is considered as a highly demanding discipline. It's also a better opportunity for young professionals to take the lead.

“In geriatrics, the QOL of doctors is high.” (Gastroenterological surgeon, 45 years old, male, Akita)

“In this area, even young people should have the opportunity to take a leadership position.”
(Geriatrician, 60 years old, male, Aichi)

“I think that the demand for geriatricians will increase as the number of elderly people increases.” (Geriatrician, 38 years old, male, Aichi)

“As a woman, the time to work is limited due to childbirth, etc., but geriatric medicine can continue for a long time.” (Geriatrician, 48 years old, female, Aichi)

“Geriatricians have the feeling that they are doing precious work, giving patients and their families a sense of security.” (Gastroenterological surgeon, 45 years old, male, Akita)

Communication: Geriatricians are better communicators. As they deal with delicate patients, they need to be more empathetic to reach the elderly people. Also, serving the senior citizens requires additional politeness, kindness and being down to the earth. At the same time, this profession provides the opportunity to build relationship with people. The reciprocal kindness and relationship between physician and patient makes it easier to treat or serve the elderly people.

“It is an interesting part of geriatrics that you can build relationships where you can relate as a person, not as a patient.” (Geriatrician, 60 years old, male, Aichi)

“The desire to give back to the elderly who have taken care of us has been the driving force that continues to be a geriatrician.” (Gastroenterological surgeon, 45 years old, male, Akita)

“Through various experiences, I feel that there are more areas where I can sympathize with the life of elderly patients.” (Geriatrician, 61 years old, male, Aichi)

“Since many elderly people are tolerant, medical treatment is easy.” (Geriatrician, 48 years old, male, Aichi)

“I think that when treating the elderly, it naturally becomes kinder.” (Geriatrician, 31 years old, male, Aichi)

DISCUSSIONS

This study finds that Japanese geriatricians are satisfied with their jobs and responsibilities. They get the pleasure of serving elderly people through providing both primary and multi-disciplinary care, they think geriatrics as a promising field for the younger generation and enjoy the challenge of being a good communicator with senior citizens by adapting humbleness, empathetic behavior and a notion of payback to the ancestors. The study findings are quite similar to other studies conducted in Japan. A previous study conducted on the job satisfaction among Japanese home visit care workers depicted that they enjoy working in a congruent environment with highly

valued communication (13). Another study conducted among nursing home staffs providing terminal care revealed providing elderly care acts as a motivational factor (15). In contrast, a study conducted in Sapporo demonstrated high dissatisfaction regarding wages and professional relationship among home care works (16). However, that study was confined to home caregivers and didn't explore the job satisfaction of physicians or geriatricians.

This study identified the gratification of geriatricians in providing elderly care in terms of primary care, inter-professional collaboration and a sense of accomplishment. Global studies also pointed that geriatrics is an wide ranged, multidisciplinary approach which requires a sound inter-professional collaboration (17). Still, there is global need for coordination in elderly care. Studies in China (18) and Germany (19) emphasized on improved training, reform of geriatric health care service and improved work flow for geriatricians. Our study also emphasized on these aspects and provides an essence of coordinated, multidisciplinary, collaborative geriatric care system in Japan. Inter-professional collaboration can be a game changer in elderly care and may set example to other countries who are going to embrace the larger number of senior citizens in near future.

Geriatrics has been identified as a promising career opportunity for the physicians in Japan. Young physicians may key role in geriatric medicine in near future. Globally, a trend of affinity towards geriatric medicine has been observed. A recent survey in UK explored that the choice to be a geriatrician has been increased among the young doctors (20). A study in Dublin identified that one third medical students are interested in building career in geriatrics (21). Work life balance and quality of life were focused by the interviewees in our study as a motivational factor

for career development. The importance of work life balance has been demonstrated in other Japanese studies (22). European studies also emphasized on working hours and payment level as a contributing factor for higher level of life and job satisfaction (23). Work life balance and payment level have been identified as important factor related to job satisfaction among American omen urologists as well (5). Often, negative impact of work-family conflict has been observed as well (24). However, good working environment, reduced work load and work life balance may play key role in further betterment of geriatric care.

Communication plays a very important role in job satisfaction. Our study findings also highlighted communication as one of the major emerging theme playing crucial role in job satisfaction of geriatricians. Not only in geriatric care, inter personal relationship and communication with people have been identified as influencing factor for job satisfaction among Japanese nurses working at general hospitals (12). The relationship between communication and job satisfaction is well research since decades (25). Communication may improve patient-doctor relationship which in turns influence the job satisfaction of care providers (24). Our study findings showed geriatricians have got a better communication with patients. Elderly people are tolerant and kind and that influenced the geriatricians to be empathetic and polite as well. Serving the elderly who contributed to the development of the society was another important factor. However, these findings may vary from country to country to sociocultural norms.

It is evident that job satisfaction has direct impact on quality of care. Despite arguments (14), studies have focused the importance of job satisfaction in quality of care. Maria et al demonstrated that job satisfaction of care providers has got significant impact on older person's

satisfaction with care (26). Our study findings can be utilized for better health care planning in Japan and other super aging countries. However, we haven't explored the barriers and challenges in geriatric career, which demands scope for future research. As there is no study on the relationship between geriatricians' job satisfaction and quality of care in Japan, this could be another promising research to be carried out.

Strength and limitations: This study has certain strength. Geriatricians perception and in depth opinion were summarized using subjective and objective qualitative techniques from different region of Japan. All the study interviews were carried out by qualitative research expert who is experienced in geriatrics as well. Qualitative content analysis was conducted to avoid any kind of bias during analysis. The study also had limitations. Due to time constraints and nationwide study settings, our study fell short of data saturation. However, variation was maintained in selecting study participants to maximize the range of view. The interviews were conducted in Japanese and translated into English for developing themes, which may deviate the original meaning to some extent. To minimize the issue, final themes were cross checked with respondents for any discrepancy. Our study didn't explore the barriers and challenges of geriatric physicians and the impact of job satisfaction on quality of care was not evaluated. Further studies applying a mix method approach might explore these issues.

CONCLUSIONS

Japanese geriatricians are satisfied with their jobs and serving the elderly is motivational to them. Current geriatricians are enjoying their works due to suitable environment, multi-professional

collaboration, work life balance and patient doctor relationship. These enabling environments should be continued to keep the momentum of ongoing geriatric care services.

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