Background

Although the healthcare industry is the largest private sector employer in Michigan, it faces pressure from the rising rates of turnover and burnout. With more than 27,000 clinical and non-clinical roles unfilled across the state, there is an urgency to mitigate further losses in the workforce. Organizational culture is integral to retention, and teamwork and feeling valued are two factors known to mitigate burnout. Moreover, a workplace culture of psychological safety and team-based care decreases turnover intention, enhances job satisfaction, and improves patient safety and outcomes.

Aim

The Center for Interprofessional Education partnered with the Michigan Medicine (MM) Wellness Office to understand how five different ambulatory care roles perceive psychological safety and team-based care depending on their seniority in the organization (Fig. 1).

Methods

We analyzed the annual employee engagement survey, administered in March 2023, for five ambulatory roles. Our team selected seven questions representative of teamwork and engagement. Seniority was determined by titles that can be ranked from least to most senior.

With the rapid rate of turnover, we recognize employees across all seniority levels have variable time affiliated with MM. We thus also investigated the interaction between seniority and duration of affiliation with MM.

Results

The data generally showcase a positive association between seniority and positive responses (agreeing/strongly agreeing) to all seven questions. In contrast, there is generally a negative association between duration of affiliation and positive responses. Following the analysis, there were two significant findings:

A statistically significant positive association emerged for three questions on psychological safety:
- Q1 (Purple): “There is a climate of trust within my work unit/department.”
- Q2 (Orange): “In my work unit/department, we discuss ways to prevent errors from happening again.”
- Q4 (Blue): “People in my work unit generally feel safe to talk about disagreements and problems.”

As duration of affiliation increases, the positive effect of seniority becomes weaker or even negative. Employees in the most senior positions and the shortest duration of affiliation with MM are most likely to perceive a climate of trust in their department.

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

- Improved Psychological Safety with Seniority: Employees with higher seniority perceive higher levels of psychological safety on their teams, a known factor present in high functioning health care teams.
- Collect Qualitative Data: “Why are there differences in perceived psychological safety across seniority? Why is there a conflicting result for a climate of trust?”
- Understand Growth Opportunities: “How do ambulatory care staff members, especially those in support roles, use professional development opportunities?”

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