Joint action on health workforce planning and forecasting

Eszter Kovács


Abstract

Health workforce mobility is a crucial factor when considering long-term strategic health workforce monitoring, planning and forecasting activities. The increased movements of health professionals have been investigated in the last few decades, when the EU enlargement and the economic crisis as significant macro-factors fostered the migration and altered some trends.

Data collection and analyses were performed in the Joint Action on European Health Workforce Planning and Forecasting (JA EUHWF 20122201) project. Quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to map available mobility data in EU Member States, and to reveal the different ways how mobility is considered in health workforce planning.

The findings showed that the availability of mobility data is highly fragmented. Even the most advanced health workforce planning systems frequently experience the lack of reliable and valid quantitative data for mobility. Different mobility indicators, mostly proxy indicators or estimates are in use, thus the precise numbers are still vague. The minimum planning data requirements for health workforce planning should contain health professionals’ in- and outflows, based on a standardized formula. Qualitative data collections might support to overcome the gaps and to complete quantitative information. Several initiatives attempt to track mobility of health professionals, however an integrated approach is needed within Europe, international data collections - such as WHO, OECD, Eurostat – should focus more significantly on mobility data. Collecting data on licensed and practicing foreign health professionals and a strengthened, more automatic information exchange between Member States would facilitate having a deeper understanding and a more exact overview of the situation. Since some popular destination countries highly rely on foreign human resources in their domestic labor force, doubtlessly necessary to calculate their volume for the future. On the other hand, countries with significant shortages also need to gain clarity of the current and future trends in order to ensure the sustainability of their health systems. Not only the numbers, but also the skills – and skill-mix – of the future health workforce should be taken into account in planning, so mutual recognitions and equivalences in trainings, or continuous professional development might be monitored among the activities.

1 Health Services Management Training Centre, Semmelweis University, Budapest, Hungary
Correspondence: kovacs.eszter@emk.sote.hu

Citation: Kovács, E. Joint action on health workforce planning and forecasting. IJCNMH 2015;2(Suppl. 1):L13
Published: 20 June 2015

Available at http://ijcnmh.arc-publishing.org

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