Key Characteristics of Positive Practice Environments
for Health Care Professionals

Background

Poor quality workplaces are a feature of many health systems around the world. Such environments weaken an employer's ability to meet the organisation's performance targets and make it more difficult to attract, motivate and retain staff. Unrealistic workloads, poorly equipped facilities, unsafe working conditions and unfair compensation feature among the many factors affecting the work life and performance of today's health care professionals and health care workers.

There are key elements in the workplace that strengthen and support the workforce and in turn have a positive impact on patient outcomes and organisational cost-effectiveness. These factors, when in place and supported by appropriate resources (both financial and human), go a long way in ensuring the establishment and maintenance of effective health care professional workforce and ultimately the overall quality of health systems. These factors constitute the matrix of positive practice environments (PPE).

Establishing positive practice environments across health sectors worldwide is of paramount importance if patient safety and health workers' wellbeing are to be guaranteed. All health sector stakeholders, be they employer or employee, private or public, governmental or non-governmental, have their respective and specific roles and responsibilities to foster a positive practice environment. They must work in concert if *Quality Workplaces for Quality Care* is to be achieved.

The following presents a checklist of key characteristics of quality workplaces for health care professionals. The checklist is intended for use by employers, professional organisations, regulatory bodies, government agencies as well as health sector professionals. It is designed as a reference tool to enable these groups to assess the quality of their practice environment, identify any deficiencies and develop strategies to address priority gaps. Each of these characteristics implies a set of rights and responsibilities for the concerned stakeholders, whether they be employers, employees or managers. Mutual respect and consideration are basic components of the organisational climate that must be established and rigorously maintained.

Positive practice environments for health care professionals:

Professional recognition

- √   Recognise the full range of competencies provided by health care professionals and provide the autonomy for these competencies to be fully utilized.
- √   Promote professional autonomy and control over practice and pace of work.
- √   Recognise and reward employee contribution/performance.
- √   Regularly assess employee satisfaction and act on outcomes.

Management Practices

- √ Commit to equal opportunity and fair treatment.
- √ Provide adequate and timely compensation commensurate with education, experience and professional responsibilities.
- √ Maintain effective performance management systems.
- √ Offer decent and flexible benefit packages.
- √ Involve employees in planning and decision making affecting their practice, work

  environment and patient care.
- √ Encourage open communication, collegiality, team work and supportive relationships.
- √ Foster a culture of mutual trust, fairness and respect.
- √ Adopt policies and procedures that positively encourage the

  reporting of professional misconduct or violation of laws/regulations.
- √ Provide clear and comprehensive job descriptions/specifications.
- √ Promote transparency in decision making processes (where applicable).
- √ Ensure effective grievance/complaints procedures are in place.
- √ Demonstrate effective management and leadership practices.

Support structures

- √ Invest in health and work environments.
- √ Foster strong employment relationships between and among employer/employee/co-workers/patient.
- √ Adhere to regulatory frameworks that ensure safe working conditions.
- √ Provide access to adequate equipment, supplies and support staff.
- √ Engage employees in continuous assessment and improvement of work design

  and work organisation.
- √ Promote healthy work-life balance through policies and programmes that support

  fair and manageable workloads and job demands/stress, and flexible work arrangements.
- √ Offer employment security and work predictability.
- √ Ensure employees practice under an overarching code of ethics.
- √ Communicate clearly communicate and uphold standards of practice.
- √ Regularly review scopes of practice and competencies.

Education

- √ Support opportunities for professional training, development and career advancement.
- √ Offer thorough orientation programmes for new hires.
- √ Foster effective supervisory, mentoring and peer coaching programmes.

Occupational Health and Safety

- √ Adhere to safe staffing levels.
- √ Adopt occupational health, safety and wellness policies and programmes that address workplace hazards, discrimination, physical and psychological violence and issues pertaining to personal security.

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