



Review

FACTORS INFLUENCING HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS' PARTICIPATION IN CONTINUING EDUCATION - CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES AND GOOD PRACTICES: REFERENCE REVIEW

S. Miteva*

Department of Social Medicine, Health Management and Disaster Medicine, Medical Faculty,
Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

ABSTRACT

This article examines specific factors that influence the participation of health care professionals in continuing education. The study is based on a review of accessible literature, including scientific publications, doctoral dissertations, strategic reports, and institutional documents discussing the individual, organizational, and societal determinants that shape the engagement of medical specialists in qualification programs. The selected sources were analysed through qualitative synthesis and content interpretation, focusing on current trends, good practices, and challenges reflected in national and international contexts. The findings reveal that motivation, organizational support, and access to resources are among the key factors that define active participation in continuing education. Innovative approaches and models—such as e-learning, mentoring programs, and flexible forms of qualification—are presented as effective means of facilitating participation and improving the quality and safety of health services. In conclusion, the study emphasizes the need for sustainable strategies and policies for human resource development in health care through systematic and accessible continuing education initiatives.

Keywords: continuing education, health care professionals, motivation, best practices, barriers.

INTRODUCTION

In today's healthcare system, healthcare professionals are faced with the need to continuously update their knowledge and skills in order to provide quality, safe, and effective services. Continuing education is a key tool for professional development, helping to maintain competencies, develop clinical practice, and ensure patient satisfaction. It is an integral part of human resources policies in healthcare and contributes significantly to improving the efficiency of healthcare facilities.

Despite regulatory and institutional efforts to encourage participation in training, a number of factors—individual, organizational, and socioeconomic—can hinder the engagement of health care professionals. Among them are limited resources, lack of time, inadequate

support from management, and the absence of a stimulating organizational culture. These challenges highlight the need for a more in-depth theoretical understanding of the conditions that influence the participation of medical staff in continuing education, as well as the identification of effective approaches to increase their motivation and access to qualification programs.

The aim of the study is to review the available literature on the factors that influence the participation of healthcare professionals in continuing education and to identify effective approaches and good practices for stimulating their engagement and professional development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is a review of the available literature, aimed at systematizing and critically analysing publications related to the factors that influence the participation of healthcare professionals in the continuing education process. The main

***Correspondence to:** Stela Mitkova Miteva,
“General Yordan Venedikov”
8, apt.5, Sofia, Bulgaria, e-mail: stela.miteva@trakia-uni.bg, telephone: 00359887328265

objective is to identify the leading individual, organizational, and societal determinants that stimulate or hinder the inclusion of healthcare professionals in qualification programs, as well as to present effective approaches and good practices that have proven their applicability in a national and international context.

The review covers fifteen sources selected on the basis of theme and content, including dissertations, scientific articles, textbooks, collections, and institutional documents. A significant portion of the materials used are dissertations available through the National Centre for Information and Documentation (NACID) and university libraries, including works by (1-6), which examine key aspects of healthcare management and the continuing qualification of nursing staff. The analysis also includes theoretical works such as the textbook by (7, 8), and the publication (9), which offers general guidelines for the development of professional competencies.

In an international context, peer-reviewed articles published in authoritative journals such as the *Journal of Nursing Management*, *Nurse Education Today*, and the *International Journal of Nursing Studies* (10-13), as well as strategic documents from the (14). Additional material was used from an anniversary conference with international participation at the (15), reflecting Bulgaria's experience in implementing lifelong learning policies.

The sources were selected after a targeted search in electronic databases, such as Google Scholar, PubMed, and ResearchGate, as well as in the catalogues of the "St. Cyril and St. Methodius" National Library and the Medical Universities in Sofia and Pleven. The selection was made based on their thematic relevance, scientific reliability, and topicality, with preference given to publications from the period 2014–2023 containing analyses and empirical data on the motivation, barriers, and effective models for continuing education of medical professionals.

The methodological approach applied is based on qualitative summarization and interpretation of the content of the sources. The analysis aims to identify similarities and differences in the theoretical positions and practical solutions proposed by various authors, and to summarize the factors that determine the active participation of health professionals in the process of lifelong learning. In this way, the

study provides a sound and transparent framework for formulating conclusions and recommendations aimed at improving human resource management in healthcare.

RESULTS

In recent years, there has been a significant shortage of human resources in the healthcare system in Bulgaria (8). The professional qualification of health workers is not built solely through their initial education, but depends heavily on continuing education and qualification within health facilities. This requires studying the organization of work and implementing measures to improve the management and quality of health care (3). In the future, the role of Health Care Professionals is expected to become increasingly important, as not only the quality and efficiency of health care, but also the economic efficiency of health care institutions in a free choice and market economy will depend on their qualifications and the number of well-trained staff.

As a result of the theoretical analysis carried out, several main groups of factors that influence the participation of health care professionals in continuing education programs can be identified. First of all, individual factors related to personal motivation, career development and job satisfaction are important. According to (10), intrinsic motivation and the drive to improve skills are among the leading determinants of engagement in training, particularly in the context of dynamic changes in health systems.

Second, organizational factors also emerge as significant. Research has shown that management support, having clear training policies, and making time and resources available to participate in training are key conditions for successful implementation of continuing education programs (12). At the same time, the lack of an organizational culture that promotes lifelong learning can become a serious barrier for healthcare professionals.

External influencing factors include the legal framework and national health strategies. Reports from the (14), highlight that countries with well-structured continuing professional education policies report higher participation rates and better health outcomes among the population.

The professional qualification of health workers depends not only on their initial training in educational institutions (7). To a large extent, it

is determined by their training in healthcare institutions, continuing education and continuing training, and career development. Sustainable development of human resources with an emphasis on specialization of medical staff and continuing education is among the main priorities of the National Health Strategy (2).

On the other hand, some authors emphasize the need for innovative forms of learning. According to (13), the integration of e-learning and hybrid models greatly facilitates health care professionals' access to courses and modules, overcoming time and place constraints.

Last but not least, social and economic factors, including financial incentives and equitable access, also matter for the participation of health professionals. (11) note that investment in human capital through subsidized training can increase not only the qualification but also the retention of staff in the health care system.

These results suggest that effective development of continuing education systems requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account the interplay between personal, organizational, and societal factors to ensure sustained improvement in health care quality.

DISCUSSION

In the course of the theoretical analysis, the importance of continuing education as a key element in the development of health care professionals clearly emerged. In today's dynamic healthcare system, there are constant changes that require healthcare professionals to update their knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to meet the increasingly complex needs of patients and provide high quality medical services. Participation in various forms of qualification not only contributes to the professional development of professionals, but also has a direct impact on patient satisfaction, the safety of the treatment process and the efficiency of the health system as a whole.

At the same time, a number of factors stand out that may hinder the active participation of health professionals in continuing education programs. These included financial constraints, lack of sufficient free time, high workload, and lack of organizational support or incentive policies within the specific health care facility. Such barriers can create the conditions for unequal access to training opportunities, particularly for those professionals who work in smaller or underfunded healthcare settings.

On the other hand, the positive impact of organizational and systemic factors is undeniable. Having a clear HR strategy focused on supporting lifelong learning, providing financial relieves, incentives and the ability for flexible planning of time are all proven successful approaches to increasing participation in training. These measures not only facilitate access to qualification programs, but also strengthen the motivation of staff to develop new competencies that are in line with developments in health technology, new clinical practices and patient needs.

It is particularly important to emphasize that continuing education should be integrated into the overall policy of the institution and be seen as a long-term investment in the quality of health care. In this sense, the role of leadership and management teams is crucial, as it is they who can create the necessary conditions and culture of learning, encouraging all employees to actively participate in qualification programs. This support should not only be in the form of time and resources, but also in the recognition and appreciation of professional development to enhance job satisfaction and a sense of belonging to the team.

Another significant direction in the discussion is related to the implementation of modern and innovative forms of training to meet the needs of health professionals in a dynamic environment. Online platforms, hybrid models, simulation training, and digital resources allow for greater flexibility and accessibility, regardless of participants' location or schedule. This is particularly important for nurses and healthcare professionals who often work shifts and cannot attend traditional face-to-face courses. Implementing e-learning could expand training opportunities while reducing the costs and logistical difficulties that typically accompany on-site training.

In addition, the effectiveness of continuing education programs is enhanced when they are tailored to the real needs of healthcare staff and focus on the practical application of new knowledge and skills. Overly theorized courses or a lack of adequate practical content can reduce participants' interest and engagement, resulting in limited impact on their work. It is therefore necessary to build trainings on the basis of a prior needs survey, incorporating opinions and suggestions from health professionals themselves.

The issue of the social and economic benefits of investing in continuing education is also an essential element in the discussion. The development of professional skills contributes to better adaptation of staff to technological innovations, improves communication with patients and facilitates the implementation of multidisciplinary approaches in treatment (6, 15). All this has a positive impact on the quality of the medical service and on the economic efficiency of medical institutions, as motivated and competent staff are more likely to be retained and productive in the long term.

The impact of cultural attitudes and societal expectations towards the health care profession should not be underestimated. In many cases, participation in continuing education involves not only personal choice, but also certain social pressures and standards imposed by professional organizations and the society (1, 4). This calls for an integrated approach to planning qualification programs, so as to take into account not only the intrinsic motivation of professionals, but also the external factors that influence their development.

Developing sustainable policies and practices to support the continuing education of healthcare professionals is vital for the future of healthcare. Successful programs must be built on a balanced model that combines individual aspirations for professional growth with organizational support and alignment with societal demands. This is the only way to ensure that health care professionals will have the resources, motivation and confidence to meet today's challenges while maintaining a high level of satisfaction and commitment to their profession. This will lead to a higher quality of health services and reinforce the importance of continuing education as a key tool for human resource development in the health system.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the theoretical review conducted, several significant conclusions can be drawn regarding the factors that influence health care professionals' participation in continuing education. Above all, it is clear that this process is critical to ensuring high quality, efficient and safe health care while supporting staff professional development and satisfaction. Individual motivations for participation related to career development, the need for improvement and personal commitment play a significant role, but equally important are

organizational and systemic factors that can facilitate or hinder access to training.

Among the organizational factors, the need to create a supportive environment that encourages learning throughout one's professional career through clearly defined policies, resource provision, and incentives for participation in qualification programs stands out (9, 5). At the same time, the application of innovative and flexible forms of training, such as e-platforms and simulation training, can significantly improve the accessibility and practical usefulness of training, especially for professionals with busy schedules or remote locations.

Based on this analysis, several practical guidelines for improving participation in continuing education can be proposed. First of all, it is necessary for medical institutions to build a long-term strategy for human resources development, in which continuing education takes a central place as an investment in the future of the organization. Second, it is important to conduct regular staff needs surveys to plan training that actually meets expectations and professional challenges.

It is also recommended to develop partnerships between health facilities, educational institutions and professional organizations to facilitate access to quality programs and share good practices. Last but not least, financial incentives and organizational facilities should be provided to motivate health care professionals to participate more actively in courses and specializations without experiencing difficulties related to workload or lack of resources.

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