

# **TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT**

## ***ROLUL MANAGEMENTULUI RESURSELOR UMANE DIN UNITĂȚILE MEDICALE ÎN GESTIONAREA STRESULUI ORGANIZAȚIONAL***

**Doctorand:**

IRINA IONELA ROTARIU

**Conducător de doctorat:**

Prof. Univ. Dr. EMANOIL MUSCALU

# **THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN MEDICAL UNITS IN MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS**

## **The Motivation for Choosing the Topic**

The research theme involves the identification, analysis and management of stress in both public and private medical facilities, as well as the role that the human resources department plays in reducing the level of employee stress. The term "stress" has become increasingly common in the everyday vocabulary of a growing number of people. Daily, many of us complain about the effects of stress on our lives.

Most commonly, we associate stress with reactions that occur in the workplace, with this type of stress having repercussions on social, professional, and family life. Awareness of this negative factor is increasingly prevalent, and there are numerous organizations and specialists in the field who have focused their attention on the effects of occupational stress on the population and the economy.

The first part of this thesis is meant to present a theoretical approach to stress and stress factors within organizations. The existence of stress in organizations of all kinds has been proven and carefully analyzed in recent years, becoming an activity that the human resources department is committed to deal with, for increasing employee satisfaction in the workplace.

The second part focuses on the presentation of theories related to human resources management in general and in medical facilities in particular, as the management of these institutions has certain specificities.

A key part of this work is the chapter on stress management in medical facilities and proposals for reducing stress in these establishments.

The final part of the thesis consists in a research section that aims at demonstrating the existence of stress in medical facilities and the way the involvement of the human resources department in creating a suitable organizational climate in the workplace is being perceived, as well as to identify and reveal the specific modalities in which the human resources department within the healthcare organizations in Sibiu County intends to be involved in managing organizational stress.

The research part is carried out through the analysis of questionnaires that have been distributed for completion in all the hospitals within Sibiu County. We have chosen large healthcare facilities with specific medical activities, as they are considered more representative of the healthcare system. The questionnaires will be customized for different categories of respondents. Some will be designed for medical staff, including doctors and nurses, as well as auxiliary staff, while others will be designed for the human resources personnel employed within the hospitals.

The chosen theme aims to develop a work that encompasses ideas, methods, and techniques for reducing workplace stress that can be easily applied in medical facilities, involving minimal costs to be readily accepted. Therefore, the doctoral thesis theme seeks to identify, analyze, and manage stress in medical and private units, highlighting the role that the human resources management plays in the stated goal of reducing employee stress. The uniqueness of the work lies in the attempt to bring together the human resources department's activity in the context of stress reduction in healthcare units into a single presentation.

The main objective is to raise awareness among top management in medical facilities about the need to measure the stress levels in these units and to achieve a reduction in this element through well-known means. Another objective is the willingness of the Human Resources department to get involved into, and solve this stress-related issue and actively participate in the development and monitoring of a stress reduction program. This department operates under the direct supervision of the manager.

Stress is a psychological reaction to the inherent demands of stressors and has the potential to make a person feel tense and anxious because they do not feel capable of coping with these demands.

Upon a deeper analysis of the concept of stress and stress factors within organizations, it has been observed that every person is constantly subjected to stressors both in their personal life and at work. However, it is essential to recognize the sources of stress, how they interact, and how they act and cause stressful effects both in the workplace and in private life.

Upon a detailed analysis, the following activities are considered stressors within organizations:

- Changes in the workplace – management change
- Employee overwork
- Inappropriate working conditions
- Interpersonal relationships within organizations
- Role ambiguity
- Workplace conflicts
- Career development
- Conflict between the role at work and other roles.

In numerous studies, occupational stress is similar to, or even synonymous with, organizational stress. It arises due to a multitude of factors.

Occupational stress is defined in scientific environments as "a multi-causal and multidimensional phenomenon reflected in the psychophysiological responses of the individual in a specific work situation, manifested by an imbalance between the demands imposed by work and the objective or subjective capacity of the individual to cope with them" (Băban, A.). Here are a few examples:

- Stress in military and law enforcement organizations
- Stress among educators
- Occupational stress in the healthcare system

S. Reece and O'Grady define management as "the process of coordinating human, informational, physical, and financial resources to achieve the organization's goals." Longenecker and Pringle define it as "the process of acquiring and combining human, financial, and physical resources to accomplish the primary purpose of the organization - obtaining products and services desired by a particular segment of society."

### **The functions of Human Resource Management**

- Competency-based recruitment and hiring of personnel.
- Developing training and development programs tailored to the organization's objectives.
- Developing salary incentive plans aimed at encouraging efficient achievements at reduced costs.
- Creating non-financial incentive systems to stimulate the interest of the entire staff in their own work.
- Rapid integration of new employees.
- Promoting career development programs.

### **Characteristics of human resource management and occupational stress in medical units**

Management in healthcare units encompasses activities, actions, tasks, knowledge, and practices related to specific norms and actions. The diversity of professions and personalities can sometimes make the unified coordination of all personnel most challenging. For this reason, the human resources department plays an especially important role in creating a climate of collegiality and professionalism.

The fact that a specific language has long been adopted in the medical environment can create an initial sense of coldness, distance, and a closed bureaucratic system. Professions in the medical system are among the most diverse. In addition to doctors, nurses, and auxiliary care staff, there is

also a need for professionals in positions that accomplish high-performance investigations, such as medical equipment engineers, physicists, psychologists, physiotherapists, IT specialists etc.

### **Stress management in medical units**

Although there has been a lot of talk about stress in recent times, there are not many statistics in our country regarding its recognition in medical units. In general, when officials are asked about the presence of workplace stress, the responses are often evasive and do not reflect reality. If its presence is acknowledged, concrete examples of stress reduction in medical units are rarely provided.

### **Mental distress - a specific stress - affects the entire group of individuals who enter healthcare facilities**

The conceptual relationship between stress and human resources in hospitals has been chosen as a key area of interest in scientific research. To obtain scientific papers for bibliometric analysis, the Web of Science database was used. The phenomenon under investigation, namely the conceptual association between stress and human resources in hospitals, has gained increasing interest in recent decades, indexed publication to 1991.



*Figure 1 – The number of indexed papers in the last 10 years*

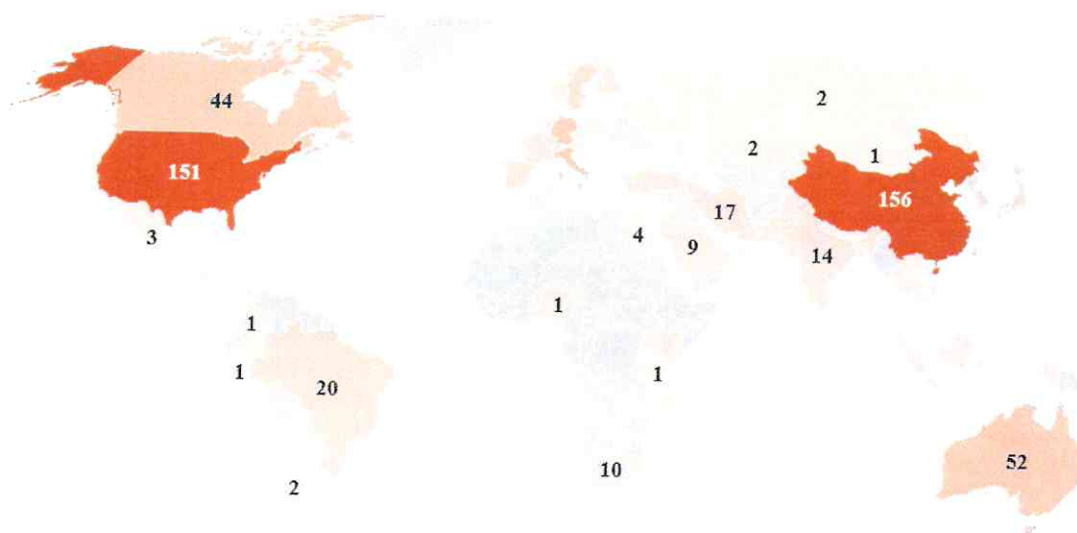
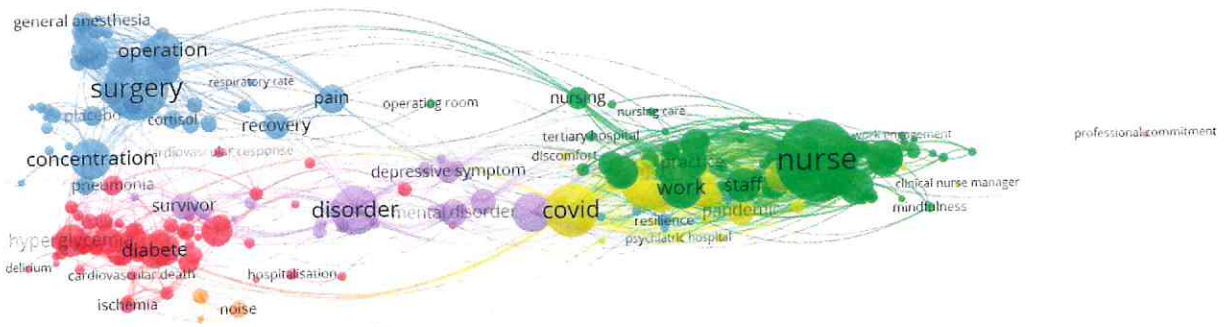


Figure 2 – Indexed papers in the last 10 years, by countries

No.	Key term	Frequency of occurrences
1	<i>Nurse</i>	427
2	<i>Surgery</i>	294
3	<i>Covid</i>	225
4	<i>Disorder</i>	188
5	<i>Work</i>	150
6	<i>Concentration</i>	141
7	<i>Health</i>	133
8	<i>Operation</i>	128
9	<i>Job Satisfaction</i>	122
10	<i>Burnout</i>	113

*Table 1 – Top 10 keywords*



*Figure 3 – Co-occurrence map of the keywords*

The bibliometric analysis of the conceptual relationship between stress and human resources in hospitals reveals a dynamic and evolving research landscape, with insights into stress factors, impact factors, interventions, and future research directions.

## **Quantitative research on the role of human resource management in occupational stress management in medical units**

I have chosen a written questionnaire as the research instrument, distributed to both the personnel employed in the Human Resources department and the employees within the medical system.

The questionnaire was completed by employees of the Human Resources (HR) department in 9 hospital units in Sibiu County, out of a total of 13. Comparing the responses given by the HR employees in healthcare units and the employees in the medical system of healthcare units, certain similarities and differences can be observed.

Here are the similarities:

- Most employees are women in both entities.
- Age and seniority proportions are comparable and overlap for the majority.
- Dissatisfaction with salaries and benefits provided. In both departments, over half of the employees are dissatisfied with them.
- Regarding their supervisor, the leader of the workplace, there is a common opinion again: they are considered competent and appreciated.
- In terms of workload, it can once again be concluded that there is common agreement, namely that it is too high, both in wards and in offices.
- Employees take pride in what they are doing.
- Most employees claim to get along well with their colleagues.
- Equally, about half of them consider protocols and standards as methods that hinder their work.

However, there are differences in the analysis of the two questionnaires:

- The workplace is considered pleasant in the HR department compared to the medical department, which does not have as many positive responses.
- Better communication in the HR department. In the hospital wards, communication is not considered optimal by some employees.
- In the HR department, there are no conflicts compared to the hospital wards.
- Promotion opportunities seem more realistic and achievable within the HR department compared to the wards.



- Teamwork with competent colleagues in HR compared to the responses given by hospital employees, who believe they work with less competent colleagues to a certain extent.
- Most HR employees believe they know their organization well. On the other hand, the medical part often states that they do not know the goals of their organization.
- Task allocation seems clear in HR. The same cannot be said for medical and auxiliary staff.

The applied questionnaires clearly reveal the presence of stress factors within medical organizations, whether in the Human Resources department or among medical personnel.

### **Study on the effects of the pandemic on human resources personnel employed in the hospitals of Sibiu County**

During the pandemic period, the following problems became evident: a high workload due to hiring more staff, frequent changes in legislation, an increase in reporting and situations, complex salary calculations, and even some very personal issues, such as changes in interaction with colleagues and modifications to the religious schedule of the institution. However, what must be emphasized as particularly important is the stress caused by the pandemic itself, which was keenly felt by all departments' employees.

The fear of illness, social distancing, and increased workloads were elements of stress induced by this pandemic period.

The questionnaire results highlight several problems that need to be addressed.

1. Adequate salaries - Although we have touched on this topic due to the lack of proper funding for the system, aligning salaries with the work performed and the level of responsibility and qualifications is a "must-do."
2. "The safety of doing things right." As mentioned earlier, continuous improvement is necessary. If training hours were conducted within the basic work hours, it would be considered a bonus, which employees would appreciate, considering the often intense and overworked environment in the system. This practice exists in some European countries, and I believe it should be implemented in our system as well. A solid theoretical and practical foundation, following international protocols, provides safety in practice. Utilizing computer programs should be another key to control errors in hospitals, benefiting both patients and employees. Ensuring the safety of doing things right reduces professional stress levels. A specific proposal is for nursing assistants to have at least a mandatory post-secondary education with a baccalaureate exam. This idea is gaining momentum, and the rules at the ministry level need to be changed, both in the education and healthcare sectors. It is unacceptable for a patient to be treated by a student with a grade of 2 in the Baccalaureate

exam. Treating and caring for patients requires a holistic and complex approach, influenced by how the healthcare provider communicates with the patients under their care. A strong theoretical and practical foundation would also help reduce stress related to the "incompetence of colleagues," as revealed by the questionnaire results, which is a source of stress for half of the respondents.

3. Reducing overwork caused by an excessive number of patients: a new law on staffing, based on patient needs, case complexity, and patient dependency levels should be introduced. This would allow healthcare personnel to fully attend to patients' needs. While the shortage of necessary medical staff is recognized, especially in hospitals in small towns and rural areas, until a real healthcare system reform is implemented, problems will persist. There is a trend and even a demand for staffing numbers to be allocated based on the degree of patient dependence, but it is not correlated with current employment regulations. Patients with a high degree of dependency require an extended period of care, which is why one nursing assistant may have to care for 2-3 patients. The involvement of hospital management, human resources, professional organizations, and even unions should converge in this direction. Some European Union countries have achieved significant changes in recent years in this regard (e.g., Ireland).
4. Awareness of stress, especially of the burnout syndrome, is crucial. In recognizing the burnout syndrome declared by some healthcare workers, the involvement of clinical psychologists is essential. In this regard, psychological counseling can be conducted in groups or individually, for all the personnel in need of support.
5. Improving communication between the medical team and the support staff (human resources, technical department, administration) is another way to initiate an organizational culture. Regular official or informal meetings with a larger number of employees from the system can help workers feel like part of a collective, get to know each other better, and work more effectively in the future, directly and even informally. In addition to this, communication courses conducted by specialists in the field would increase job satisfaction, reduce conflicts, and improve the quality of medical care. The organization's management (managers) must address the needs of all employees, be well-prepared in this field or in management in general, knowing that a strong theoretical foundation in this field can bring a lot of benefits.
6. Understanding the organization and involvement in decision-making: understanding the specific procedures in medical units, their development based on the organization's real needs, and, most importantly, consulting the ones directly involved can reduce the stress felt by employees. The human resources department can transmit relevant information to all employees through electronic channels, letters, or internal memos.

7. Creating updated job descriptions – among the main responsibilities of the human resources department. Creating comprehensive job descriptions can be beneficial. An obligation to rotate medical staff could be introduced, so that individuals with similar qualifications perform certain tasks, ensuring fair distribution. Allowing certain individuals to carry out the most complex aspects of work increases occupational stress.
  
8. Finding concrete ways to reduce stress through sports programs, forming groups for hobbies related to music, painting, physical activity, etc. can be a starting point. The Sibiu Psychiatric Hospital has constructed a sports facility for employees, which is a positive initial step. However, there is still a timid attempt by authorities, introducing a deduction in the Fiscal Code – Law 227/2015, Article 68 (updated), for the cost of subscriptions for using sports facilities for sports or physical education for personal well-being, prophylactic, or therapeutic purposes. This deduction is regardless of whether the activity is carried out individually or in association, with a limit equivalent to 400 euros per year for each person.

It might be helpful to explore relaxation methods such as massages, spa treatments, or similar activities, as seen in private companies. Physical relaxation has stress-reducing effects, and practices such as meditation, support from the church, and, most importantly, from family and friends, optimism, and peace of mind can also contribute.

In addition to these, subscriptions to cultural events, such as shows, theater performances, cinema, or museum visits can be considered. Hiking and spending time outdoors with colleagues could be other suggested ideas for reducing organizational stress in healthcare units.

The limitations of this research are related to the fact that it analyzed the role of human resources from the perspective of both their own employees and hospital staff, only at the county level of Sibiu. The role that this department can play in reducing occupational stress is underrepresented.

Given the increase in the number of private hospitals, where staffing is based on the actual need for personnel rather than the number of beds, an analysis of the stress levels experienced by employees in these private hospitals compared to those in state hospitals can be conducted. Furthermore, stress levels among employees in large, university-affiliated, or county hospitals can be compared to those in small, town-based hospitals. Since there are few studies on occupational stress in healthcare in our country, this field could be extensively researched in the future.