

Chapter 38

Who Will Take Care of Me? The Future of Human Resources in Anaesthesiology, Critical Care, and Emergency Medicine in Europe.

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ABSTRACT

Foreseeing the needs and availability of anaesthesiologists across Europe is a challenging task. This is influenced by different factors that include the composition of the workforce and the organization and structure of health services in every country. Some trends call for attention, such as changes in work patterns brought about by an ageing specialist population, the increasing numbers of women in anaesthesia, or cultural and societal shifts towards work-life balance. Anaesthesiology is a challenging specialty with an expanding scope of practice, requiring highly motivated professionals, frequent long work hours, and addressing stressful situations often. To ensure quality anaesthesia provision, the wellbeing of this diverse population of anaesthesiologists should be addressed. Achieving rational and flexible work hours, adequate compensation, and promotion of a workplace culture that fosters safety, motivation to learn, and equal opportunities for leadership or academia positions are challenges to be addressed to make sure that excellence in patient care is maintained.

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INTRODUCTION

Foreseeing in advance the needs and availability of anaesthesiologists across Europe is a challenging task. It is a very complex issue influenced by different factors including the composition of the workforce and the different organizations and structures of health services in every country. Some trends call for attention, such as changes in work patterns brought about by an ageing specialist population, the increasing numbers of women working in anaesthesia, or cultural and societal shifts towards work-life balance.

Anaesthesiology is a challenging specialty with an expanding scope of practice, requiring highly motivated professionals, frequent long working hours including nights, and very often addressing sudden stressful situations. To ensure high quality anaesthesia care, the wellbeing of this diverse population of anaesthesiologists should also be addressed. Achieving rational and flexible work hours, adequate compensation, and promotion of a workplace culture that fosters safety, motivation to learn and equal opportunities for (also flexible) leadership or academic positions are key challenges that should be tackled if we want to make sure that excellence in patient care is maintained (De Hert, 2018).

Current Situation in Anaesthesia, Critical Care, and Emergency Medicine

Anaesthesia departments across Europe are facing a higher workload due to their involvement in many hospital areas, which are growing or expanding their scope of practice. Anaesthesiologists are asked to provide round the clock services ensuring quality and safety in critical care, operating theatres, pain clinics, emergency patient care (both in and out of hospital) and palliative care.

The question is, as the population in Europe gets older, demand for specialized healthcare services is expected to keep growing. The burden of disease grows at an estimated 10% per year (Benziger, Roth, & Moran, 2016). Noncommunicable - or chronic - diseases are responsible for more than 60% of deaths on the continent. As average life expectancy in Europe is growing (76.7 years in 2010 to 77.9 years in 2015) (World Health Organization, 2018) so are the health problems associated with age and sedentary lifestyles. Although the obesity rate in Europe is still far from the numbers reported in North America, an increasing number of Europeans are joining the ranks (*Health at a Glance: Europe 2018*, 2018).

One reason for concern is the fact that resources are not growing at the same rate. Socialized health care systems as available in most European countries are closely monitored to optimize spending and efficiency. An estimated 10% of GDP in the EU is directed to healthcare, with countries like Germany, Sweden or France allocating even more than that. Yet, the annual average growth rate in healthcare spending in Europe went from 3.1% in 2005-2009, before the 2008 economic crisis, to 0.7% in the 2010-2015 period (*Health at a Glance: Europe 2018*, 2018). This affects both the material setup and management of the hospital as well as the possibilities to recruit and compensate available workers.

The Demographics of Anaesthesia and Critical Care

Age

A recent review by Giacalone et al (Giacalone, Zaouter, Mion, & Hemmerling, 2016) highlighted the fact that European anaesthesiologists are aging, too. In France, about 50% of the anaesthesiologists working in 2005 will be retired before 2020, and there is no sufficient replacement. The government has suggested an increase in retirement age to 72 years of age to compensate. In the UK it is estimated that

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