Author’s response to reviews

Title: Which positive factors give General Practitioners job satisfaction and make General Practice a rewarding career? A European multicentric qualitative research by the European General Practice Research Network.

Authors:

Bernard Le Floch (blefloch1@univ-brest.fr)

Hilde Bastiaens (hilde.bastiaens@uantwerpen.be)

Jean-Yves Le Reste (lereste@univ-brest.fr)

Heidrun Linder (lingner.heidrun@mh-hannover.de)

Robert Hoffman (Hoffman5@netvision.net.il)

Slavomir Czachowski (s.czachowski@to.home.pl)

Radost Assenova (r_assenova@yahoo.com)

Tuomas Koskelas (tuomas.koskela@uta.fi)

Zalika Klemenc-Ketis (zalika.klemenc.ketis@gmail.com)

Patrice Nabbe (nabbe.patrice@univ-brest.fr)

Agnieska Sowinska (sowinska@umk.pl)

Tristan Montier (Tristan.Montier@univ-brest.fr)

Lieve Peremans (lieve.peremans@uantwerpen.be)

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Which positive factors give General Practitioners job satisfaction and make General Practice a rewarding career? A European multicentric qualitative research by the European General Practice Research Network.
Bernard Le Floch, MD; Hilde Bastiaens, MD, PhD; Jean-Yves Le Reste, MD, Phd; Heidrun Linder, MD; Robert Hoffman, MD; Slavomir Czachowski; Radost Assenova, MD; Tuomas Koskelas, MD, Phd; Zalika Klemenc-Ketis, MD, Phd; Patrice Nabbe, MD; Agnieska Sowinska, PhD; Tristan Montier, MD, PhD; Lieve Peremans, MD, PhD

BMC Family Practice

We thank the editor and reviewers for their helpful comments on improving the article. We have responded to the comments, point by point, in the following text. We have put our own comments in red and in bold.

Pr Bernard Le Floch.

Geoffrey Keith Mitchell, MBBS PhD (Reviewer 1):

This is an important and original study that has obviously taken a lot of effort to complete. Congratulations to the authors. Thank you!

The rationale is well described, as are the methods. The multicultural nature of this study presents particular challenges which are outlined in the discussion. I think the methods could mention more about the nature of these and what steps were taken to manage the cultural and linguistic challenges. We have added some sentences about this.

As an international reader (Australia) I am not familiar with the place of GPs and primary health doctors in the countries involved. I think a table outlining these would be helpful. We have added an Appendix 1 in the Background section. In particular - whether the practitioners are practice owners, independent employers, or state employees? What is the place of the GP in each country with respect to gate keeping to the health system? Gate keeping if present gives GPs a powerful place in the medical system, and the absence of this role can marginalise them and render them relatively powerless. It is easy for patients to bypass the GP and go straight to specialists, whether this is appropriate or not. Is there any relationship between a gate keeping role and attitudes to the job? (Powerlessness leads to frustration. How to GPs in countries without gatekeeping keep up their morale?) What about the presence of employment controls - where you can work, how you can work and the like. If these are the norm, is there a relationship between lack of control and satisfaction with the role? Are they salaried or paid fee for service?
Is there a national insurance scheme available or other system that facilitates or discourages regular attendance to a doctor? Are regular holidays available? Also, how were participating countries chosen? Were some views excluded because of that choice? All the countries represented in the EGPRN were invited to participate. Any country which wished to be involved in the study could have participated. No country was excluded. Only Turkey left the group during the project because of political issues.

The findings have face validity. I do like that allowing GPs independence to place themselves where they like and personalise their practice is important.

There was also a lack of contrary views present in the paper. There were virtually no GPs presenting negative views (although I understand the aim was to gather positive views). Was the selection of GPs biased towards those with a positive view of the profession? Only the positive views were analysed. Participants were stimulated to talk about their positive experiences through the interview guide and in the interview procedures, in accordance with the research question. Were there participants who were less satisfied with their jobs who struggled to find the positives? The older age of the cohorts does suggest that participants were those whose love of the job may have encouraged them to stay on. Some participants were young and had recently set up in general practice: maximal variation.

In the long run, the value of this paper lies in how health policy can change in order to encourage people to consider general practice as a career and keep them there. This is done to some extent, but changing established policy settings can be very challenging. Hence I think the recommendations for policy changes could be more explicit. National policy settings on things like gate keeping and salary vs fees, training and formal specialist recognition of GPs are all important in facilitating choice towards a career in general practice. I think the paper could make this point a bit more strongly. Yes! We have added a sentence in the Conclusion.

Overall though, an excellent and thoughtful paper.

Thank you again for your useful comments!
Grant Russell (Reviewer 2):

Thanks for the opportunity to review the article Which positive factors give General Practitioners job satisfaction and make General Practice a rewarding career? A European multicentric qualitative research by the European General Practice Research Network for the BMC Family Practice.

The study intended to clarify the positive factors involved in appeals and retention in GP throughout Europe.

The aim was to explore the positive factors supporting the satisfaction of General Practitioners (GPs) in clinical practice throughout Europe.

This was a solid article that describes some common themes in GPs self perception across Europe. While the article was carefully presented, I felt that there were numerous examples where the quality of the written English detracts from the quality of the article.

For example: the term "forcefulness balance" (line 24 page 6) is strange; and sentence fragments like "furthermore, General Practice has a specific context and job satisfaction theories overlap" (page 7) could be reviewed for clarity. Overall the English seemed better later in the article - a careful proof read would reduce the frequent iterations and make the work more readable. We have improved the sentences.

I had several suggestions concerning the paper, each relate to sections of the work.

1) Background and contextualisation.

The authors frame the problem in terms of the shortage of generalist primary care physicians in Europe and the perceived need to focus upon those positive factors that attract and retain GPs in the workforce. The case for the research is reasonable, although some of the justifications (ie the term of "confusion bias") are a little confusing (ie "hygiene"). This part was not clear. We have rephrased it.

2) Description of the methods.

The methods were staged and thoughtful. I liked the collaborative approach and how there appears to have been significant thought put into the unfolding analysis. They used a template editing approach with what seemed to be a pre-determined coding tree. Saturation at a national level seemed a good decision. In terms of reflexivity we had some insight into the background of
the researchers, although it would have helped to have a better idea of the discipline of the leaders and main influencers of the work. In the Results section, we mentioned that participants were registered GPs working in primary care settings, with diversity of setting and location of practice. Overall interviewers were GPs working in clinical practice and in a university of college. We have added a sentence in the Method section.

3) Analysis and presentation of the findings

There was a good use of quotes and the findings were clearly presented.

The sample is reasonably well described, although I would have liked to have had an idea of the distribution of participants at early stages of their careers. I worry a bit when participants seem to speak with one voice - that is very much the case in this article. Indeed the authors provide a description of the findings that generates very little discrepancy in terms of findings apart from its mention about the different perspectives across nations. One of the results of this study is the concordance between the different countries. It was for us also surprising. We have other projects (using the Delphi method) for finding differences between populations.

I would have been very interested for example to see whether there was a range in findings along age, gender or experience lines.

The discussion puts the results into the context of other general practice studies, and has a focus on WONCA's capability statements. I was unsure why there was a focus on these, given that it was not intent of the study. It is difficult to analyse subgroups in a qualitative study, even with the large number of participants and the wealth of data available. The themes could be tested by a questionnaire study in a different survey.

I have several suggestions to improve the work:

Firstly As with many qualitative studies (and this may be a language issue) the authors presented the assertions about the participants as facts rather than being personal perspectives. For example at the bottom of page 17 - "Positive GPs are persons with intrinsic specific characteristics (open-minded, curious) and they feel comfortable in their job when they are trained in specific clinical and technical skill areas and have efficient communication skills." Inserting the words the
participants "described themselves as being" would be a more accurate summary of the data. OK. We have revised this in some sentences in the Results section.

Despite the work being conducted from a phenomenological perspective, I was struck by its theoretical nature. The findings are described rather than analysed and despite reference to other GP literature, the themes weren't examined in terms of some of the broader literature about professionals and their working lives. Theories about job satisfaction have been scanned (Herzberg, Maslow). It was difficult to go deeper even though some topics are common to other professions, specialists, paramedics, or even non-medical personnel. While not critical, this would have added considerably to the value of the article. We presented the results as facts. The interpretation is further developed in the Discussion.

Finally, I think that there could be a better justification of the premise of the paper. It clearly sought positive factors- I can understand this but perhaps a better case should be made in the introduction as to why more of a balance wasn't sought to explore the competing demands that may influence self perception even in the light of a positive notion of self and profession. The explicit aim was to focus on positive factors since a lot of research has already been done on negative factors.

Overall this is a solid if unspectacular paper. A deeper and more thoughtful analysis, particularly a search for disconfirming cases would have added to its contribution. As it is, the transcontinental perspective is of interest to the readers of the journal.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the article, I hope the review has been of assistance.

Thank you for your particularly helpful comments!