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Summary

- Exit interviews can help answer questions about why professional health staff leave the work and/or country in which they were trained, where they go and what they intend doing.
- Exit interviews inform employers about the conditions of work that lead to people leaving.
- Exit interviews are appropriate to all health care organisations, but particularly in low resource settings where production costs are high and staff replacement is expensive.
- Exit interviewing is a straightforward process that can be incorporated into resignation processes.
- Periodic summaries of exit interviews can assist in identifying trends and changes in health professionals' choices relative to policy changes.
- The survey template at the end of this brief is suitable for use in health care organisations of Pacific Island countries and can be modified for particular situations.

Simple

Discussing strategies to reduce human resource wastage and improve staff retention in the health sectors of Sub-Saharan Africa, Dovlo [2005] suggests the use of EIS to collect data about departing health workers. The EIS is a simple system, yet the information it provides can help generate policy responses to complex issues; a feature which is especially appropriate in countries and within organisations where information of this type is scarce, as in the Pacific. If countries cannot answer questions about why staff are leaving and where they going, they have little chance of creating effective policy responses.

Effective

The EIS features in efforts to monitor attrition and to increase staff retention in healthcare organisations and teaching institutions. Contino [2002] suggests that conducting exit interviews to determine reasons for nurses joining and leaving a particular organisation or service is a crucial element in efforts to reduce nursing turnover. Glossop [2002] reports that preliminary data on student nurse attrition was successfully collected by instituting a system of exit interviewing, also noting that exit surveys can be especially useful in documenting multiple reasons for leaving. More recently Nkonki, Cliff & Sanders [2011] have proposed the implementation of exit interviews to help differentiate types of attrition and their causes.

Flexible

The EIS is a tool which can be modified and adapted to suit the individual purposes of a service or organisation. Giacalone, Jurkiewicz & Knouse [2003] note the versatility of the EIS, summarising its three broad purposes in the following way: to collect diagnostic and strategic information; to assess employees' perceptions; and to provide departing employees (especially

Background

The absence of information in six Pacific Island countries (PICs) regarding the migration and mobility of their health workers was recently reported and the use of exit interview surveys (EIS) recommended [Doyle et al. 2013]. To assist in filling this gap we have designed a survey template to collect information on why health professionals leave service, what they intend doing and where they intend going after leaving. The survey template can be used in its current form or modified as needed.

Exit Interview Survey Process

The development of policy and/or measures to help minimise workforce losses requires that current and comprehensive information is gathered from resigning employees. Collecting such information on resignation can be incorporated into the normal exiting process for resigning staff. A number of features of the EIS make it useful for health care organisations in low resource settings.

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those who may be critical of the organisation) an opportunity for personal catharsis.

For further discussion of the role of the EIS and some of the benefits and limitations of exit surveying see Doyle & Roberts [2012].

Exit Interview Survey Template

The main purpose of the survey template presented in this policy brief is to collect strategic information over time on how many staff are leaving overall, the numbers and proportions of different types of staff exits, reasons for leaving, and the intentions and destinations of exiting staff. The template consists of six sections: employee details, employer details, type of exit, destination, reasons for leaving and the most important reasons for leaving.

In designing the template we have assumed that departing employees will fill out the survey and that completion will be a mandatory part of the exiting process. To encourage responses to all questions, most only require ticking and/or circling to answer.

Customising the Exit Interview Survey

Modifications to the template (for example regarding the level of detail, range of topics, and format and administration of the survey) will depend on the type of organisation and its particular information needs. However, when adapting the template and making decisions about its content and format, a number of issues need to be considered. Some of the more common ones are presented below.

Purpose: Establish the objectives of the exit survey and identify what data items are required to meet those objectives.

Administration and format: Establish protocols for administration of the survey questionnaire. Is the survey questionnaire to be completed by the departing employee on site or to be returned later to the organisation? If a face-to-face interview is to take place how will it be conducted? Delivery options include hard copy (pen and paper), computerised (e.g. word file/email), and online format (e.g. using free online survey software such as Survey Monkey). Responsibility for inputting basic data also needs to be assigned in cases where the employee has died.

Content and structure: Questions included will depend on the purpose of the EIS. In regard to question format, fixed or structured questions are preferable in situations where the departing worker is completing the survey. Open-ended questions require more time to answer and may act as a disincentive to complete all survey questions. Although providing valuable in-depth data, responses to open-ended questions also require significant organisational resources to process responses into coherent summaries.

Response rates: There are a number of ways to encourage high response rates. Reluctance to complete the survey can be reduced by achieving a good balance between the information needs of the organisation and the length of the survey. Including

the EIS as a mandatory element in the exiting process can also contribute to higher response rates. However, it should be noted that a mandatory process introduces additional ethical considerations regarding questions asked and summary reporting.

Confidentiality: It is important to establish protocols for administering the survey which ensure confidentiality and anonymity as much as possible. Reporting survey findings for a period of time must be done in aggregated form so that individual respondents cannot be identified from the data. This may be difficult in small organizations; hence in these situations it is counterproductive to ask questions that are not relevant to informing a policy response applicable to all staff.

Processing: Establish protocols for regular and timely inputting of data into a central database and for periodic reporting to senior management.

In summary, the EIS is an efficient and flexible method for collecting valuable information on health workers exiting the health system. Using a structured survey form provides the necessary data items to monitor different types of exits over time. Importantly, exit interviews can also provide information about unpopular policies or conditions of employment which may be contributing to staff losses and help employers consider policy options to reduce staff 'wastage'.

Further information

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Why do they leave and where do they go? Exit interviewing of resigning staff

Exit Interview Survey Template

1. Employee Details	
Sex: Male / Female (circle)	
Age: ___ (in years)	
Nationality:	(specify)
Current Position:	(specify)
Specialisation:	(specify)
Length of service (agency): ___ (years) ___ (months)	
Length of service (sector): ___ (years) ___ (months)	
2. Employer Details	
Organisation/Service:	(specify)
Location:	(specify)
3. Type of Exit	
Is the exit: Temporary / Permanent (circle)	
If permanent what is the type of exit: (tick)	
Retirement <input type="checkbox"/> Resignation <input type="checkbox"/>	
Redundancy <input type="checkbox"/> Termination <input type="checkbox"/>	
End of contract <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ <input type="checkbox"/>	(specify)
If temporary what is the type of leave: (tick)	
Sick <input type="checkbox"/> Maternity <input type="checkbox"/>	
Study <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ <input type="checkbox"/>	(specify)
4. Destination	
(tick and circle ALL that apply)	
• I have a new job to go to. <input type="checkbox"/>	
Health sector / Not in the health sector (circle)	
Lower level / Same level / Higher level (circle)	
Public sector / Private sector (circle)	
In this country / Overseas (circle)	
• I will be looking for a job in the... <input type="checkbox"/>	
Health sector / Other sectors / Both (circle)	
• I am taking up further education. <input type="checkbox"/>	
• I am migrating to another country. <input type="checkbox"/>	
Which country? _____ (specify)	
Do you intend to return? Yes / No / Unsure (circle)	
If 'Yes' within how many years? _____ (specify)	
• I am moving within the country. <input type="checkbox"/>	
Where are you moving to? _____ (specify)	

5. Reasons for Leaving	
What are the main factors in your decision to leave? (tick ALL that apply)	
a) Professional	
Dissatisfaction with remuneration	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poor work environment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Heavy workloads/long hours	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of recognition	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conflict with colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of career prospects	<input type="checkbox"/>
Insufficient professional development	<input type="checkbox"/>
Location/poor living conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of or inadequate allowances	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of resources/funding	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of or weak support/supervision	<input type="checkbox"/>
High stress and frustration	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of safety/risk of violence	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rather not say	<input type="checkbox"/>
None of the above	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other _____ <input type="checkbox"/>	(specify)
b) Personal	
Family issues	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children's education	<input type="checkbox"/>
Security	<input type="checkbox"/>
Career change	<input type="checkbox"/>
Travel	<input type="checkbox"/>
Further education	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improve quality of life	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health problems	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rather not say	<input type="checkbox"/>
None of the above	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other _____ <input type="checkbox"/>	(specify)
c) Social/Political	
Instability	<input type="checkbox"/>
Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rather not say	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other _____ <input type="checkbox"/>	(specify)
6. Most Important Reasons for Leaving	
1. _____	
2. _____	
3. _____ (specify)	

