

# Motivation among Health Care Professionals: Strategies for Improvement

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Received on: 25 October 2024; Accepted on: 18 November 2024; Published on: 31 January 2025

## ABSTRACT

Motivation is a critical factor in workplace performance, especially in the health care sector, where the demands are high and the stakes are even higher. Defined as the driving force that influences behavior and performance, motivation plays a pivotal role in enhancing the productivity and well-being of health care professionals. Theories such as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and Self-determination Theory (SDT) have contributed significantly to understanding both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors in the workplace.

In health care, motivation of health care professionals directly impacts the quality of patient care, professional satisfaction, and team dynamics. Highly motivated health care workers demonstrate improved performance, greater resilience in stressful environments, and stronger relationships with patients and colleagues. Research suggests that motivated health care professionals are more likely to engage in continuous learning, collaborate effectively, and contribute to positive patient outcomes.

This commentary delves into the importance of motivation through a case-based scenario showcasing the role of a doctor in a hospital and highlighting both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that drive his performance. The commentary also includes strategies to assess and enhance motivation, such as creating a supportive work environment, fostering professional growth, and recognizing individual achievements. In conclusion, motivation is a key determinant of success in health care, influencing the overall effectiveness of health care teams, improving patient outcomes, and fostering professional growth and satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Extrinsic motivation, Healthcare, Intrinsic motivation, Job satisfaction, Motivation, Professional burnout.

*Journal of Postgraduate Medicine, Education and Research* (2025); 10.5005/jp-journals-10028-1702

## INTRODUCTION

Motivation can be defined as "an individual's degree of willingness to exert and maintain effort toward organizational goals."<sup>1</sup> The term motivation originates from the Latin word *movere*, meaning "to move." Motivation is a term commonly used in various areas of life and is often associated with related concepts such as inspiration, encouragement, and impetus. While inspiration sparks the internal drive to act, motivation is the force that turns this drive into action. Both are interdependent, as inspiration alone is insufficient without motivation to follow through.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF MOTIVATION IN HEALTH CARE

Motivation is a critical factor in health care, driving professionals to provide high-quality, patient-centered care. It significantly influences their dedication, enthusiasm, and overall performance, thereby impacting the quality of care provided to patients. Karaferis et al. in their study state that highly motivated health care workers create a positive work environment, which leads to increased efficiency and job satisfaction. Motivation positively influences employees' willingness to perform their duties, directly contributing to productivity and fairness.<sup>2</sup> Motivated professionals are more likely to empathize with patients, understand their needs, and provide compassionate care, fostering better relationships and improving patient satisfaction. Additionally, they continuously seek new knowledge and skills, leading to better practices and improved patient care outcomes.<sup>3,4</sup> Health workers can enhance their learning and dedication to their jobs by engaging in career planning, whether it be personal or institutional. By helping health

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**How to cite this article:** Sharma A, Upadhyay K, Goel S. Motivation among Healthcare Professionals: Strategies for Improvement. *J Postgrad Med Edu Res* 2025;59(1):35–38.

**Source of support:** Nil

**Conflict of interest:** None

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care professionals plan their careers, organizations and health systems may boost employee morale and retain motivated staff.<sup>5</sup>

World Health Organization (WHO)<sup>6</sup> states that the motivation of health care workers is key to achieving health system goals, such as improving health outcomes, promoting equity, meeting nonmedical needs of patients, providing social and financial risk protection, and enhancing the efficiency of the health setting. On the other hand, low motivation leads to poor work performance, significant employee turnover, absenteeism, and duty evasion.<sup>7</sup> Healthcare professionals experiencing burnout report feelings of emotional exhaustion, which diminishes their ability to provide compassionate care.<sup>8</sup> This emotional drain can lead to a decline in motivation, resulting in disengagement from professional responsibilities.<sup>9</sup>

## THEORIES OF MOTIVATION PERTAINING TO HEALTH CARE

Over time, various theories explaining motivational behavior were put forward by eminent thinkers; we will be discussing the most common theories that directly pertain to health care. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory highlights distinct drivers of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction for health care professionals. Motivators (intrinsic factors) like recognition, achievement, career growth, and personal development lead to job satisfaction and a sense of purpose. Conversely, hygiene factors (extrinsic factors) such as fair compensation, supportive hospital administrative policies, and effective leadership help reduce dissatisfaction but do not enhance satisfaction on their own. For health care professionals, balancing both motivators and hygiene factors is essential: motivators drive engagement and dedication among health care professionals, while well-managed hygiene factors minimize stress or burnout, enabling professionals to focus on providing high-quality patient care and effective decision making. In the same way, Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory can be applied to understand and enhance motivation among health care professionals. At the bottom of the pyramid are the physiological needs—such as fair salary and conducive working conditions—forming the foundation for workforce stability. Addressing safety needs through job security, health insurance, and safe working environments further supports health care professionals' well-being. Satisfying social needs fosters a sense of belonging, encouraging teamwork and reducing workload. Meeting self-esteem needs through recognition, appreciation, professional status, and responsibilities builds confidence and job retention. Finally, fulfilling self-actualization needs with challenging tasks and opportunities for creativity helps health care professionals reach their full potential. This alignment aids in creating a motivated, resilient workforce.<sup>10</sup>

Another theory developed by Deci and Ryan, Self-determination Theory (SDT), provides a framework for understanding human motivation through three core psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These needs are particularly relevant in health care, where fulfilling them can significantly impact health care workers' job satisfaction and performance.<sup>11</sup> In health care, autonomy involves empowering health care professionals to make decisions about patient care and work processes. A work environment that encourages decision-making and idea-sharing fosters intrinsic motivation among health care workers. Competence involves feeling effective and capable in one's role. Healthcare workers who perceive themselves as skilled and competent are more likely to take on challenging tasks and persist through difficulties. Relatedness concerns the formation of meaningful connections and feeling supported by others. In health care, fostering a collaborative environment where professionals can build relationships with colleagues and patients enhances both motivation and well-being.<sup>12</sup>

### CASE SCENARIO

Dr Raghav Mehta, a 38-year-old senior physician at a renowned hospital, is known for his dedication and passion for patient care. He has been with the hospital for over ten years, starting as a resident and working his way up to a senior position. Recently, Dr Mehta has felt a decline in his motivation, struggling with an increased workload, pressure from administration, and a lack of recognition. Over the course of several months, this demotivation has begun to take a toll on his performance and enthusiasm. His colleagues have

also noticed the change, as Dr Mehta, once the first to volunteer for challenging cases, has become withdrawn and less engaged. His decreased motivation is beginning to affect not only his well-being but also the overall quality of care he provides. Dr Anil Kapoor, the hospital's Medical Director, noticed the changes in Dr Mehta and decided to step in and offer a lifeline to Dr Mehta.

This scenario will follow Dr Mehta's journey and address different aspects of motivation in health care, incorporating relevant theories and strategies to reignite his drive.

### Part 1: Job Dissatisfaction and Lack of Recognition

*Dr Mehta, once eager to get ready early for work, now experiences fatigue even before the day starts. Despite handling complex cases and consistently going beyond, his contributions were rarely acknowledged. Dr Mehta's once proud successes now appeared ordinary, and his work seemed meaningless without acknowledgment. Moreover, his salary, while adequate, has not been adjusted to reflect his growing workload, adding to his dissatisfaction.*

According to Herzberg's Two-factor Theory, the lack of recognition and opportunities for career advancement were affecting his intrinsic motivation, while stagnating wages added to his dissatisfaction. Recognizing the problem as a lack of recognition and intrinsic motivation, Dr Kapoor introduced solutions like Recognition and Rewards Programs,<sup>2</sup> where hospital management implemented formal recognition programs that celebrate achievements. Recognizing Dr Mehta's efforts publicly or offering incentives for outstanding work can increase job satisfaction. Another solution was Adjusting Compensation and Career Development, where periodic salary reviews and clear career progression pathways were introduced to keep intrinsic and extrinsic motivators aligned.<sup>13</sup> Providing opportunities for professional growth will address the desire of health care professionals for achievement and personal growth, which are key motivators.

### Part 2: Burnout and Neglect of Basic Needs

*The pressure on Dr Mehta was intense. His shifts often stretched well beyond scheduled hours, and with the overwhelming patient load, he barely had time to take breaks. Sometimes, he worked through meals and even skipped rest periods. Coupled with a lack of clear job security—fueled by rumors of budget cuts—his anxiety grew.*

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Dr Mehta's physiological and safety needs were not being met. Without rest, proper meals, and a sense of job security, his ability to focus on patient care was waning. To alleviate this, Dr Kapoor introduced a more flexible shift schedule and mandatory breaks during shifts. He implemented a "Work-life balance" policy where all health care professionals had to adhere to a strict rule of taking adequate time off between shifts. Additionally, he set up a "Wellness Program" that provided access to mental health support and wellness resources such as yoga and meditation classes within the hospital premises.<sup>14</sup>

These changes immediately impacted Dr Mehta's physical and emotional health, helping him feel more secure and cared for by his workplace. He began to recover from his burnout and slowly regained his energy.

### Part 3: Erosion of Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness

*Dr Mehta's renewed energy brought back some of his enthusiasm, and Dr Mehta has always been driven by a strong sense of responsibility and autonomy in his decision-making. However, recent changes in*

hospital policies, including more rigid guidelines and less autonomy in patient care, have left him feeling restricted. His sense of competence has also taken a hit, as he feels bogged down by administrative duties, leaving little time for professional development or applying his skills in challenging medical cases. The feeling of teamwork and cooperation with his coworkers has decreased, as the hospital atmosphere has become more competitive and less team-oriented.

As per SDT, Dr Mehta's need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness was no longer being fulfilled. Understanding the importance of autonomy and competence, as outlined in SDT, Dr Kapoor suggested solutions to address Dr Mehta's waning motivation. First, restoring autonomy by involving him and other physicians in decision-making, particularly regarding patient care and hospital policies, would allow him more control over his work. This empowerment could reignite his intrinsic motivation. Additionally, enhancing Dr Mehta's competence through continuous professional development, such as specialized training and mentoring opportunities, would boost his confidence and sense of efficacy. Lastly, fostering relatedness by strengthening team dynamics through regular team-building exercises and peer support would help Dr Mehta reconnect with his colleagues and feel a greater sense of belonging.<sup>12,15</sup>

#### Part 4: The Role of Purpose and Inspiration in Sustaining Motivation

The core of Dr Mehta's identity as a physician was his passion for patient care. Despite improvements in recognition, competence, and autonomy, he still felt disconnected from his original purpose. The hospital's growing focus on financial metrics and administrative efficiency had overshadowed the patient-centered care that had once fueled him. He began to question whether his work was making a difference.

In line with SDT, intrinsic motivation thrives when professionals are aligned with their purpose. Recognizing this, Dr Kapoor proposed solutions to reignite Dr Mehta's passion, like reconnecting with purpose, where health care professionals are encouraged to reconnect with the core values of patient-centered care. Regular meetings where doctors share patient success stories or reflections on their work can inspire motivation. For Dr Mehta, participating in community outreach programs or initiatives focused on improving patient care can reignite his sense of purpose. The other solution involves leadership communication, where leaders must consistently communicate the hospital's mission and align organizational goals with patient care outcomes.

#### Part 5: The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Health Care Motivation

Emotional intelligence (EI) has always been a strength of Dr Mehta's, allowing him to connect sympathetically with patients and colleagues and effectively manage his stress. Nevertheless, his ability to control his emotions and self-awareness has begun to suffer from the ongoing stress at work. He observes that he has started acting strangely, being irritable toward his colleagues and aloof from his patients. Because it enables health care workers to successfully negotiate challenging emotional situations and sustain constructive relationships, EI is a critical component of motivation maintenance.

So, Dr Kapoor also decided to implement EI training<sup>16</sup> with an emphasis on self-awareness, empathy, and self-regulation. Dr Mehta and other health care professionals may find it easier to handle stress and uphold solid interpersonal ties with the support of this



Fig. 1: Strategies to motivate health care employees

training, which will boost their drive. One way to boost emotional well-being is to set up a peer support or counseling system where professionals may talk about emotional difficulties and get advice. It would be beneficial for Dr Mehta to have colleagues with whom he can vent and reduce feelings of loneliness (Fig. 1).

### CONCLUSION

Dr Mehta's drive can be renewed by taking care of his fundamental requirements, encouraging feelings of recognition and belonging, providing possibilities for advancement, using improved management techniques, and strengthening his EI. The health care sector may foster an environment where professionals like Dr Mehta are motivated to provide excellent patient care while finding personal fulfilment by using effective techniques. Healthcare professionals frequently confront a variety of problems that can drain their motivation.

Healthcare institutions can guarantee that their staff members stay engaged, resilient, and motivated in their work by comprehending and addressing the different aspects of motivation through theories like Herzberg's Two-factor Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, SDT, etc. This creates an environment in health care organizations that not only meets the professional needs of the workers but also inspires them to perform at their best.

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