

Gap narrows between Norwegian and German doctors

A DOCTOR'S LIFE

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Norwegian doctors have better working conditions than German doctors, but the differences are smaller than previously.



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Since 1994, the Institute for Studies of the Medical Profession has surveyed the working conditions of doctors in Norway. We have shown higher levels of job satisfaction (1, 2), shorter working weeks (2, 3) and lower levels of work-related stress (2) for doctors in Norway than in Germany. Is this still the case?

We have now compared results from the institute's panel of doctors with a questionnaire survey conducted in Germany in 2021. The results show that the working conditions are still better in Norway than in Germany, but the differences appear to have diminished over time (4).

We measured ten different aspects of job satisfaction. Compared to the period 2006–10 (1, 2), there were fewer aspects where Norway had significantly higher scores: variation in work, opportunity to use one's own abilities, and general job satisfaction (4).

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The stress of long working weeks exceeding 49 hours was still less prevalent among doctors in Norway than in Germany: 28 % versus 44 % (4).

Self-reported work-related stress was examined using a model in which job effort is measured against the reward that doctors derive from such efforts. Those who experienced a critically high level of work-related stress were at greater risk of stress-related afflictions. We found a significantly higher proportion of doctors who reported critically high levels of work-related stress in Germany (67 %) than in Norway (53 %), but the difference was smaller than in the study from 2010 (2, 4). In both countries, the proportion of doctors with critically high levels of work-related stress had increased. There was also a clear association between work-related stress and job satisfaction among doctors in both countries. Doctors who experienced a critically high level of work-related stress scored significantly lower on all aspects of job satisfaction compared with those who had less work-related stress (4).

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In most countries, health service restructuring is an ongoing process, which impacts on doctors' daily work. Studies from Germany describe an increase in administrative tasks, financial pressure, long working days and insufficient staffing (4). In Norway there is evidence of growing work-related stress among hospital doctors (5), and an increasing workload among GPs due to the transfer of duties from the specialist to the primary health service (6). We have also demonstrated an increase in work-related stress (7) and strain caused by long working hours (8) among GPs, together with a downward trend in job satisfaction both for GPs and hospital doctors (9).

Improved working conditions, better job satisfaction and reduced work-related stress are essential for quality of care, effective communication, career choices and doctors' health (7, 9). A large proportion of doctors in both countries with a critically high level of work-related stress indicates a need for health-promoting and preventive measures (4).

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