

SHORTAGE OF SKILLED WORKERS IN INPATIENT LONG-TERM CARE IN THE FEDERAL STATE OF SAXONY-ANHALT: AN EVIDENCE-BASED OVERVIEW OF OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS TO ADDRESS THE SHORTAGE OF QUALIFIED NURSING STAFF IN INPATIENT CARE

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the issue of the shortage of skilled workers and outlines the causes and shows ways to reduce it.

Keywords: Skilled labor shortage, nursing sector, Saxony-Anhalt, workload, nursing innovation.

INTRODUCTION

The shortage of skilled workers in inpatient long-term care in Germany, particularly in the state of Saxony-Anhalt, represents a considerable challenge for operators of inpatient long-term care facilities. This article examines the current circumstances and causes and at the same time defines possible solutions to the problem outlined.

Demographic development and needs analysis

Saxony-Anhalt is facing an ageing population structure, as it is already known that the proportion of people over 65 will increase by 2030 (State Statistical Office of Saxony-Anhalt, 2021). This inevitably leads to an increased need for inpatient long-term care places and qualified nursing staff.

Current situation on the labour market

The labor market situation for nursing professionals in Saxony-Anhalt is very tense. It must be noted that in 2023, 500 positions in inpatient long-term care were vacant, and it can be noted that in the same year, 278 nursing professionals were registered as unemployed. This unequal distribution means that the workload for existing nursing professionals is increased and the quality of care is significantly impaired (Federal Employment Agency, 2024).

Causes of the shortage of skilled workers in inpatient long-term care

The low attractiveness of the nursing profession, due to monetary remuneration, high physical and psychological stress and a lack of career opportunities, contributes significantly to the shortage of skilled workers (Federal Ministry of Health, 2023). Training capacities are also inadequate, and there is a lack of qualified mentors to impart the practical training content in the facilities. In addition, an increasing migration of nursing staff to other sectors is further exacerbating the problem.

Effects of the shortage of skilled workers

The shortage of skilled workers has a direct impact on the quality of care, as overworked nursing staff cannot adequately meet the individual needs of those in need of care. This leads to a significant deterioration in care outcomes and an increase in nursing errors. The working conditions for nursing staff are also increasingly deteriorating, which leads to health problems and high fluctuation (Werner, 2024). From an economic point of view, the ongoing shortage of skilled workers means high recruitment and training costs for the operators of inpatient care facilities, as well as additional costs for the induction and training of new nursing staff.

Possible solutions and strategies

The following measures can help to alleviate the shortage of skilled workers:

- Improving working conditions through fair pay, flexible working hours and comprehensive health promotion in the workplace.
- Promoting training and further education by creating additional training places and a shortened recognition period for foreign nursing qualifications.
- Use of technologies such as care robots and digital documentation systems to reduce workload and increase efficiency.
- International recruitment of nursing professionals and targeted integration measures.

Outlook and future developments

Inpatient long-term care in Saxony-Anhalt will continue to face major challenges in recruiting new nursing staff in the coming years. Sustainable and digital solutions are required to be able to cover the increasing need for care in the coming years. Fundamentally, close cooperation between politicians, nursing facilities and nursing schools as well as technological innovations and targeted measures to improve working conditions will be crucial to increasing the attractiveness of the nursing profession and reducing the shortage of skilled workers in the sector. In this way, Saxony-Anhalt is creating the conditions for the currently more than 25,000 nursing and care staff in the state's more than 400 inpatient care facilities to be deployed more efficiently (Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Health and Equality, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The shortage of skilled workers in the long-term inpatient care sector is a complex problem that is strongly influenced by a variety of factors. A sustainable solution requires comprehensive and coordinated measures that take into account both the needs of those in need of care and the requirements of nursing professionals. The shortage of skilled workers can be effectively reduced by improving working conditions, promoting training and continuing education, and using technology and international recruitment measures (Seidl, 2022).

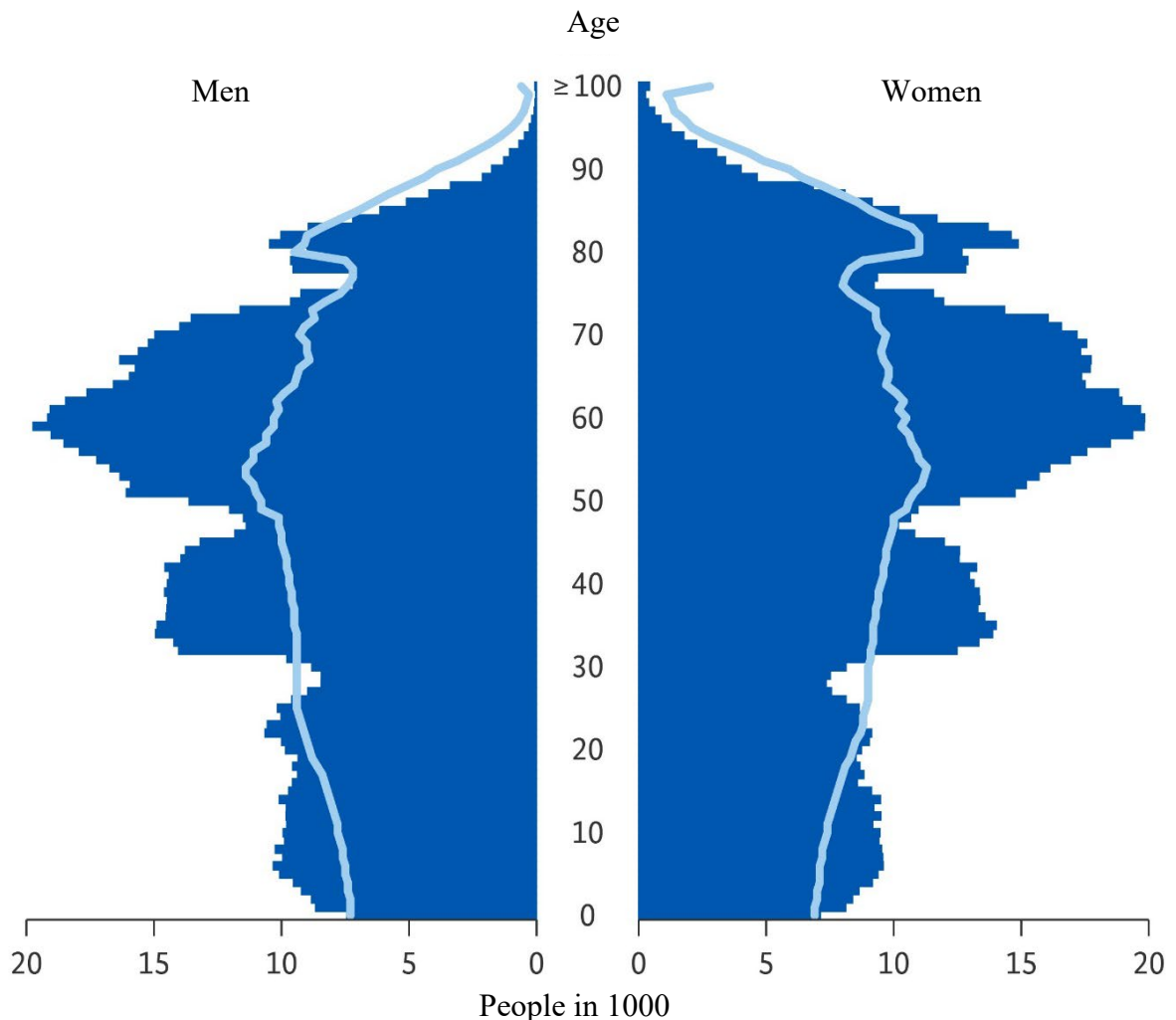
Initial situation

The shortage of skilled workers in inpatient long-term care is an urgent problem that is leading to considerable challenges in many regions of Germany, including Saxony-Anhalt. This problem affects not only the quality of care, but also the working conditions and the sustainability of the care system as a whole. This specialist article examines the current state of the shortage of skilled workers in inpatient long-term care in Saxony-Anhalt, then analyses the causes and offers evidence-based solutions, taking into account current research results and statistical data.

Aging population

It can be stated that Saxony-Anhalt is affected by a strong demographic aging. The population density is declining and will shrink by 16% by 2035 (State Statistical Office, 2021). It can be stated that the proportion of older people in Saxony-Anhalt is steadily increasing; according to the Federal Statistical Office, the proportion of people over 65 was 606,035 on December 31, 2023, making it the highest figure (Statista, 2024).

The following figure shows the demographic development in Saxony-Anhalt:



Graphic 1: Age pyramid of Saxony-Anhalt. Source: Federal Institute for Population Density. 2024

Care needs and care places

The increasing need for care requires an increase in the capacity of nursing places in inpatient facilities. Many nursing facilities are already at their capacity limits and the waiting lists for nursing places are long. This poses considerable challenges for inpatient long-term care, as not only more long-term care places are needed, but above all more qualified nursing staff (Norddeutscher Rundfunk, 2024).

Qualification and further training

An important aspect of the shortage of skilled workers is the shortage of qualified nursing staff. Many nursing staff do not have the necessary qualifications to meet the increasing work demands (Digitales Institut, 2023).

Low attractiveness of the nursing profession

Another major reason for the shortage of skilled workers is the low attractiveness of the nursing profession. Low wages, high physical and emotional stress and a lack of opportunities for advancement mean that only a few young people choose to train in geriatric care (Bodewein, 2024).

Training reform

The Nursing Professions Act combines the previous vocational training courses in geriatric care, health and nursing, and health and pediatric nursing. Since January 1, 2020, there have been new nursing training courses for "nursing professionals" and "nursing specialists", which make it possible to work in all areas of care. This reform improves the training conditions and increases the attractiveness of the nursing profession. Trainees no longer have to pay school fees and receive appropriate training remuneration. In addition, academic training at a university with a bachelor's degree is possible. This makes nursing training more attractive and appeals to new target groups (Aslan, 2020).

Quality of care

The shortage of skilled workers has a direct impact on the quality of care. Overworked nursing staff cannot adequately take care of the needs of those in need of care, which in turn leads to a deterioration in the quality of care (Konnegen, 2023).

Working conditions

The working conditions for nursing professionals are continually deteriorating due to the shortage of skilled workers, resulting in overtime, high physical and emotional stress and high levels of sick leave. The study by the Hans Böckler Foundation from 2024 shows that nursing professionals suffer from mental and physical health problems due to the working conditions in everyday nursing (Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, 2024).

Economic impact

The shortage of skilled workers also has economic consequences. For example, the operators of care facilities have to incur high costs for recruiting foreign nursing staff and training new nursing staff. In addition, the high level of fluctuation leads to additional costs for the induction and training of new nursing staff (German Nursing Council, 2023). Furthermore, facilities are under a heavy financial burden because they have to cover the shortage of nursing staff with temporary workers in order to be able to meet the legally required staffing ratio (Federal Employment Agency, 2023).

Solutions and strategies

Improving working conditions

A key measure to reduce the shortage of skilled workers is the structured improvement of working conditions. This includes appropriate pay, flexible working hours and measures to promote health in the workplace. The introduction of wage increases and bonus payments can help make the nursing profession more attractive. Furthermore, a pool of substitutes can help to make working hours more flexible. A study by the Bertelsmann Foundation from 2023 makes it clear that better pay and improved working conditions increase employee satisfaction and loyalty in all sectors (Deister, 2023).

Promoting training and further education

Strengthening training capacities and promoting further training measures are crucial. Furthermore, closer cooperation between nursing schools, nursing facilities and politicians is essential if nursing training is to become more attractive. It can be stated that programs for in-service training and the recognition of foreign nursing qualifications also help to reduce the shortage of skilled workers (Krüger, 2019).

Technological support

The use of new technology, such as nursing robots and digital documentation systems, can help reduce the workload of nursing staff and increase efficiency. It has been shown that the use of technological innovations in nursing can significantly reduce the workload of nursing staff and improve the quality of care (Krüger-Brand, 2020).

International recruitment

The recruitment of nursing professionals from third countries can help to reduce the shortage of skilled workers in the short term. Programs for the recognition of foreign nursing qualifications and for the linguistic and professional integration of foreign nursing professionals are of great importance here. For example, a specialist article by the Federal Employment Agency from 2022 makes it clear that the international recruitment of nursing professionals can be successful if it is supported in parallel by targeted integration measures (Federal Employment Agency, 2022).

Outlook and future developments

The shortage of skilled workers in long-term inpatient care in Saxony-Anhalt is likely to remain a major challenge in the coming years. Demographic developments and the increasing need for care require long-term and sustainable solutions. Close cooperation between politicians, care facilities, nursing schools and other relevant actors is necessary to effectively combat the shortage of skilled workers. Technological innovations, targeted training and continuing education programs and measures to improve working conditions can help to increase the attractiveness of the nursing profession and reduce the shortage of skilled workers.

Method

The systematic literature review was used to identify relevant sources that contributed to the creation of this article (Brocke et al., 2009). The method includes several steps to ensure that the information presented is well-founded and reliable (Härer & Herzwurm, 2022).

Here is an overview of the method:

1. Identifying topics and objectives

- **Identification of the problem:** The shortage of skilled workers in inpatient long-term care in Saxony-Anhalt.
- **Objective:** Investigation of the current situation, analysis of the causes, presentation of the effects and development of possible solutions.

2. Literature research

- **Conduct a comprehensive literature search:** using current reports, studies, articles and statistics.
- **Sources:** Official reports from ministries, studies from research institutes, publications from professional associations and trade unions, and scientific articles.

3. Data analysis

- **Quantitative data:** Analysis of statistical data such as population trends, job vacancies, education levels and economic impact.
- **Qualitative data:** Inclusion of surveys and studies that examine the working conditions and satisfaction of nurses.

4. Structuring the article

- **Structure:** The article has been divided into different sections to ensure a clear and logical structure (summary, introduction, keywords current situation on the labour market, Causes of the shortage of skilled workers, effects of the shortage of skilled workers, solutions and strategies, case studies and best practices, outlook and future developments, method and presentation of results).
- **Integration of a figure:** Visualization of data and facts to increase understandability.

5. Analysis and interpretation

- **Data interpretation:** Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data to draw informed conclusions.
- **Critical appraisal:** checking the reliability and relevance of sources and data.

6. Formulation and presentation

- **Clear presentation:** The article has been written in such a way that it is understandable both for experts and for a wider audience.
- **Evidence-based argumentation:** Using scientific evidence to support arguments and conclusions.

7. Sources

- **Citing sources:** All sources used were cited according to scientific standards and listed in the bibliography.

This systematic and focused approach ensures that the article is based on a solid scientific foundation and provides relevant and up-to-date information (Meerphol, 2024).

RESULTS

The shortage of skilled workers in inpatient long-term care in Saxony-Anhalt is a complex problem caused by a variety of factors. Comprehensive and coordinated measures are required to meet this challenge. These include improving working conditions, promoting training and further education, and using technology and international recruitment measures. Only through a joint effort by all actors involved can a sustainable solution be found that meets both the needs of those in need of care and the requirements of nursing professionals (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2023).

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