Conceptualization of the Construct of Intention to Stay in Academia for Physician Assistant Faculty

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Physician Assistant (PA) Faculty Retention

• A challenge for PA education and administrators of PA programs\(^1\),\(^2\)

• Importance of the issue
  • High market demand for PAs\(^3\)
  • Growth in PA education
    • From 100 programs in 1996 to 173 programs in 2013\(^4\)
  • Large numbers of faculty new to academia
    • 43.3% of PA faculty in current position for \(\leq 3\) years\(^5\)

• Faculty turnover historically
  • From 1986-2005, an upward trend culminating in 14.2% of PA faculty leaving positions in 2005-2006 academic year\(^6\)
  • Improvement recently – long-term trend?\(^5\)
Current Knowledge about PA Faculty

- PAEA Annual Reports
  - Demographic information
  - Professional characteristics
  - Program directors’ perceptions of faculty attrition
    - #1 reason given is “return to clinical practice”\(^5\)

- PA Faculty Satisfaction Study by Boeve\(^7\)
- Professional Burnout Study by Forister & Blessing\(^8\)
- A thorough review of PA education literature and conversations with a few PA researchers did not reveal any other studies that have described PA faculty or investigated issues related to their retention. (D. Asprey, personal communication, October 23, 2010; M. Davidson, personal communication, February 9, 2010; R. Hooker, personal communication, February 7, 2011)
Approaches to Studying Faculty Retention in the Higher Education Literature

• Job satisfaction
• Identifying why faculty leave or stay
• Retention interventions
• Turnover intentions
  • Intention to leave has been studied much more frequently than intention to stay
  • No established methodology for proper measurement of turnover intentions was identified
  • No qualitative investigation of turnover intentions was identified
Measurement of Psychological Constructs

• Psychological construct: an abstract trait that exists in theory but cannot be perfectly predicted or measured\(^9\)
  • “Intention to stay in academia” is a psychological construct

• So how do we measure a psychological construct?
  • Potential observable indicators of the construct are identified in a construct theory\(^10\)
  • Measurement of the construct is then conducted indirectly through the construction of probabilistic inferences from discrete observations of these indicators\(^11\)
  • Caveat: not all psychological constructs are measureable!
Purpose of this Study

• To conceptualize the construct of “intention to stay in academia” for PA faculty
  • This was needed to identify potential observable indicators of the construct
  • This was conceived as the first step in developing a meaningful measure of “intention to stay in academia

*“Intention to Stay in Academia” was defined as the anticipation or willingness to continue in an academic role
Theoretical Framework

• Operationalization of “intention to stay in academia” for PA faculty should
  • Incorporate a broad range of individual, structural, and contextual factors that may influence a PA’s decision to remain in academia. This was informed by the works of Barnes, Agago, and Coombs,12 Johnsrud and Rosser,13 Matier,14 Rosser,15 and Smart.16
  • Reflect the meaning of the variable for PA faculty, specifically, due to the importance of discipline-specific factors in faculty retention noted by Xu17
• Matier’s classification framework was adapted.14
Classification of Indicators of “Intention to Stay in Academia”

Indicators of Intention to Stay in Academia

- Individual
  - Environmental
    - External
    - Internal
      - Tangible
      - Intangible
METHODS
Sampling

• Guided by the principles of appropriateness and adequacy\textsuperscript{18}
• Purposeful sampling experts in PA education
• Inclusion criteria
  • Being in a full-time position in PA education for at least 10 years
  • Being eligible to practice clinically as a PA
  • Being in a different program than faculty already selected for this phase
Procedures

• Semi-structured phone interviews
• Informed consent to tape interviews and use quotes
• Sample questions
  • Tell me about your choice to become a full-time PA faculty member
  • Think about PA faculty who you have interacted with over the years who have been in academia long-term and will likely persist in academia until retirement. How would you describe them?
  • Can you think of anything else that differentiates those PAs who stay in academia long-term from those who return to clinical practice after a few years?
• Interviews conducted until saturation was reached
Data Analysis

• Ongoing throughout interviews
• Extracted data coded in terms of potential observable indicators of “intention to stay in academia” for PA faculty
• Codes were categorized according to the expanded Matier’s classification framework
RESULTS
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Example #1 of data coding

• Almost all experts emphasized the importance of having a mentor in academia
  • Coded as “mentor”
  • Categorized as an individual factor
Example #2 of data coding

• Code: multiplication effect
  • The ability to teach multiple students at one time in academia has “a bigger ramification for healthcare than teaching one student at a time.” [Expert #4]
  • “Every once in a while I get a student or a graduate coming, that they remember something that I taught them and they use it in their clinical care. So a piece of me is in that clinical encounter and I’m indirectly impacting patient care. That’s an awesome responsibility.” [Expert #5]
  • “I feel like I touch more patients by producing more providers than I’d ever be able to touch just working clinically…” [Expert #13]
• Six other experts made similar statements...
• Categorized as an internal, intangible factor
Example #3 of data coding

• Code: identify as educator
  • “I’m a PA educator. That’s really what I should do... I would be really frustrated being a clinician. I would just sort of eventually find ways to be an educator inside of a clinician, and probably not be as good of a clinician as I should be because I would be distracted by being an educator... I’m an educator and that’s all there is to it.” [Expert #7]
  • Several similar statements by other experts
  • Classified as an individual factor
Coding Results  *(full list available in handout)*

- 114 unique codes used in data analysis
- 78 codes emerged with enough frequency to retain in the construct conceptualization
  - 3 external environmental indicators (e.g., family support of an academic career)
  - 5 tangible internal environmental indicators (e.g., faculty development activities)
  - 32 intangible internal environmental indicators (e.g., autonomy; sense of community in institution)
  - 38 individual characteristics (e.g., detail-oriented), motivations (e.g., sense of vocational calling to PA education), or experiences (previous teaching experience)
Comparison to Literature Review

• Interviews were a richer source of individual factors conceptualized to contribute to “intention to stay in academia”

• 31 individual factors and 15 intangible internal environmental factors not identified in the literature emerged with frequency in the interviews

• Only two factors identified with frequency in the literature review did not emerge in the interviews: “support for research” and “organizational commitment”
Discrepancies in Construct Conceptualization

- Varying views on the relevance of external environmental factors
- Specific discrepancies
  - Geography
  - Fringe benefits
  - Salary
CONCLUSIONS
General Conclusions

• Experienced PA faculty conceptualize “intention to stay in academia” as a complex construct that is influenced by many factors, particularly individual factors and intangible aspects of the work environment.

• The field of PA education is ripe for qualitative research!
Limitations of the Study

• Only experienced PA faculty were interviewed = potential for gaps in the construct theory
  • Less experienced PA faculty?
  • PAs who have left academia?
  • Non-PA PA program faculty?
• A broad theory of PA faculty “intention to stay in academia” was not extracted
References


References


VALIDATION OF A MEASURE OF INTENTION TO STAY IN ACADEMIA FOR PA FACULTY

To be presented tomorrow at 11:00
QUESTIONS?

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