Enhancing the attractiveness of long-term care in the E.U.

Demographic shifts and growing demand are resulting in workforce shortages and financial sustainability challenges in the provision of long-term care for chronic patients and senior citizens in Europe.

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Demographics point to an increasing number not only of elderly but of chronically ill people across Europe. The challenge for policymakers and caregivers is to provide quality long-term care (LTC) while keeping things financially viable.

Traditionally, LTC jobs have been perceived as inherently unrewarding, unattractive and, consequently, unstable.

Is there really an "attractiveness gap" between LTC jobs and others in the health-care sector?

To address these questions, IESE's Stefano Visintin, Marta Elvira and Carlos Rodríguez Lluesma compared the current stability and attractiveness of LTC jobs relative to other health-care related occupations in and across 26 European countries during the period 1992-2011.

Using job stability as a uniform indicator of attractiveness, the study reveals that, on average, LTC jobs are as attractive as other health-care related jobs in most European countries.

Regional European differences

Having said that, differences emerge across countries, classed into three broad categories.

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Countries where LTC jobs are least stable and, as such, least attractive are clustered in southern and eastern European countries, including Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Spain.

Countries where LTC jobs are notably more attractive are in central and northern Europe, including Belgium, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

This leaves the rest, including the United Kingdom and France, where the "attractiveness gap" with other health-care jobs seems the least marked.

Risk of a shortage of caregivers

What accounts for these cross-country differences? They can be partly explained by regional and policy frameworks, according to the authors.

Apart from regional differences, perhaps the most important finding is the suggestion that southern and eastern European countries appear most at risk of facing a shortage of caregivers relative to their central and northern European neighbors.

Any shortage would inevitably cause costs to spiral out of control, posing even greater budgetary challenges, not to mention serious social consequences.

To avoid this scenario, policymakers in these countries need to have the foresight to create the career conditions that would attract and retain a steady supply of LTC jobseekers.

Further research could help by exploring the factors that influence LTC worker and job profiles, for example, as well as institutional frameworks.

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