

HIGH STABILITY, HIGH RISK: THE DUAL CHALLENGE OF EXPERIENCE RETENTION VERSUS DEMOGRAPHIC DECLINE IN ESTONIAN HOSPITAL PHARMACIES

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Background and importance

The long-term continuity of hospital pharmacy services is a critical priority. The Estonian Hospital Pharmacists' Society (ESHP) included supporting this sustainability in its 2023-2026 development strategy. Workforce planning is crucial due to recognized challenges in finding new staff, particularly for the pharmacy assistant profession and in regions further from major cities.

Aim and objectives

The overall aim of the study was to map the current hospital pharmacy workforce. Key objectives included analyzing the age composition, reviewing the placement of staff aged over 60, and quantifying the speed of demographic change through a comparative analysis of the 2023 demographic baseline against projections for the year 2025.

Material and methods

The initial study by ESHP in 2023 encompassed the entire hospital pharmacy workforce (total 108 professionals) across 22 hospital pharmacies. The personnel analyzed consisted of 77 pharmacists and 31 pharmacy assistants. The analysis focused on professional tenure (categorized as <5y, 5-10y, >10y) and age distribution (seven cohorts, up to 71+). To estimate emerging trends and future challenges, the 2023 baseline data were analyzed comparatively against demographic projections for the year 2025.



Results

Workforce Stability



The workforce exhibits high stability, with 71% of pharmacists and 58% of pharmacy assistants having worked in the hospital pharmacy system for more than 10 years. Overall, 57 pharmacists and 22 pharmacy assistants have more than three years of experience (>3a).

Pharmacist Aging Trend



The comparison revealed a significant acceleration of aging trends. In 2025, 33% of all hospital pharmacists were older than 60 years. It is especially critical in small county pharmacies, where 1–2 pharmacists work.

Pharmacy Assistant Demographic Risk



Pharmacy assistant cohort faces the highest demographic risk, with 47% of pharmacy assistant projected to be 61 years or older by 2025. For pharmacy assistants, the 61–65 age cohort is projected to rise sharply from 13% in 2023 to 25% in 2025.

Pharmacy managers' opinions regarding the most common challenges and success factors in workforce recruitment

Challenges



Success Factors



Conclusion and relevance

The comparison of the 2023 baseline with the 2025 projections reveals a critical contradiction: exceptional professional stability is coupled with an impending, accelerated demographic crisis. The projected high proportion of staff reaching retirement age by 2025, particularly among pharmacy assistants, poses a severe and immediate threat to service continuity. Strategic focus must urgently be directed towards effective succession planning, recruitment, and increasing the overall valuation of hospital pharmacy work, especially in smaller hospitals.

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