Understanding Workplace Experiences Among PAs Who Have Changed Employers

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Background

Turnover rates in healthcare (20.4%) are second only to turnover rates in hospitality (31.8%).\(^1\)

PAs have been estimated to have a turnover rate of 14.2%.\(^2\)

The cost of turnover in healthcare is not only expensive but may also impact patient care.\(^3\)

Almost half of all PAs have quit a job at least once due to stress, burnout, or a toxic workplace, with another 12.8% considering quitting for these reasons.\(^4\)

Burnout is a growing issue within healthcare and recent research has shed light on the problem.\(^5\)

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4 Coplan B, McCall TC, Smith N, Gellert VL, Essary AC. Burnout, job satisfaction, and stress levels of PAs. *JAAPA.* 2018;31(9):42-46.
Methods

**Sample:** 2018 AAPA Salary Survey. Fielded to all PAs in the US, for whom AAPA Research could email and for whom there was a valid email address. The survey was also available through social media channels. A total of 9,140 PAs completed the survey.

**Variables examined:**
- Overall Career Satisfaction *(5 point scale)*
- Overall Employer Satisfaction *(5 point scale)*
- Fair Compensation Agreement *(5 point scale)*
- Likelihood to Recommend Employer *(5 point scale)*
- Evaluation of Burnout Symptoms *(professional fulfillment, physical exhaustion, interpersonal disengagement)*
- Career Change measure *(if they made a change, type of change, reason for change)*
How common was it for PAs to make a career change?

18.7% made a career change (employer, specialty, setting) in 2017

12.4% changed their employer in 2017
Why did PAs change employers in 2017?

- Other reasons, including combinations of the below: 27.9%
- Obtain a better work life balance: 23.4%
- Better compensation and benefits: 17.0%
- Due to a move: 14.8%
- Better professional/clinical opportunities: 10.7%
- Opportunity to switch to a new clinical focus/specialty: 6.2%

Percent of Respondents Who Indicated This Reason For Changing Employers in 2017
Who changed employers?

**Women** were more likely to have changed their employer in 2017.  
13.0% of women changed employers  
11.1% of men changed employers  
($X^2 = 5.61$, $p = .018$)

**PAs with less experience** were more likely to have changed their employer in 2017.  
13.6% of PAs in the early career phase (0 to 5 years) changed employers  
12.7% of PAs in the mid-career phase (6 to 20 years) changed employers  
8.5% of PAs in the late-career phase (21 or more years) changed employers  
($X^2 = 21.91$, $p < .001$)
Why did they change employers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Early Career</th>
<th>Mid Career</th>
<th>Late Career</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better work/life balance</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better compensation/benefits</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Were those who changed employers happier with their new employer?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Employer Satisfaction</th>
<th>Career Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>77.5%</td>
<td>Highly</td>
<td>Most will highly recommend their employer, regardless of whether they changed employers. (M = 3.94 v M=4.03, changed v did not change employer)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>77.0%</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Most have high satisfaction with their employer, regardless of whether they changed employers. (M=3.82 v M=3.90, changed v did not change employer)</td>
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<tr>
<td>83.1%</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Most have high career satisfaction, regardless of whether they changed employers. (M=4.20 v M=4.30, changed v did not change employer)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Were those who changed employers happier with their compensation?

2 out of 3 PAs felt that they were fairly compensated the previous year, regardless of whether they changed employers.

(M = 3.67 v M=3.64, changed v did not change employer)
Did those who changed employers report less burnout?

96.9%  
Professionally Fulfilled

83.8%  
Low Interpersonal Disengagement

46.2%  
High Work Exhaustion

Those who changed employers for a better work life balance indicated lower work exhaustion than those who changed employers for any other reason.  
(M=1.259 v M=1.394, changed for work-life balance v changed employer for any other reason)

The caveats:  
Those that changed employers had less general PTO or sick and vacation time!

It is unknown if work exhaustion predicts intent to leave to seek better work life balance.
Summary

- Turnover is a problem within healthcare; 12.4% of PAs changed their employer in 2017 alone.

- PAs are leaving their employer for a variety of reasons, the most common of which is work-life balance.

- Those who changed employers did not necessarily have any difference in many practice characteristics (e.g., hours worked, patients per week, or salary received).

- Compensation does not appear to drive change.

- The first year with a new employer does not necessarily mean greater work satisfaction for PAs.

- **BUT.** Those who changed employers for a better work life balance indicated lower work exhaustion than those who changed employers for any other reason.
Application to PA Education

The PA education model provides a broad generalist training.
– Allows PAs to make the career changes when needed.
– PAs are making use of the flexibility their generalist training provides.

While almost half of all PAs have quit a job at least once due to stress, burnout, or a toxic workplace, changing employers may have a limited relationship to burnout when looking at a point in time. BUT,
– PAs are at risk for burnout.¹
– PA students are at risk for burnout.²
– Burnout, and well being, should be addressed during training to strengthen the clinician’s resilience over the long term.

Questions?

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