

Empowerment is key to better performing hospital employees, study says

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Credit: Drexel University

For many patients, what helps make their hospital stay a much better experience is the help of a good health care provider at their bedside. But what helps these providers perform better? A recent study showed

that feeling empowered goes a long way in dynamic settings like those of hospitals and empowerment can be promoted by creating an environment that encourages proactive behaviors directed toward prioritizing patient care.

Empowerment has been studied extensively over the past few decades in a variety of contexts but a recent study led by Lauren D'Innocenzo, PhD, an assistant professor in the LeBow College of Business, found that empowering teams is an important means by which leaders can enhance an individual's performance.

For their study, researchers looked at data involving 544 individuals in 78 [hospital](#) units within two hospitals collected from multiple sources over three different time periods. The researchers found that "team empowerment created a synergistic interaction with individual-level psychological empowerment as related to an individual's job performance, as well as an indirect effect on performance via individual empowerment."

The researchers looked at hospitals because of the high-stakes involved in their employee's performance. Study results emphasized hospitals' need to promote participatory systems that allow providers to speak up, prioritize tending to patients and alert doctors of patients in need. These types of environments should promote feelings of empowerment in both teams and individuals which increases performance.

"While empowerment is often cited as a key ingredient in health care, our research also reports that the benefits of empowerment are not always realized," said D'Innocenzo. "We saw empowering teams and employees as a way of overcoming some of the critical issues in hospitals and wanted to know why the presence of empowerment does not always produce an increase in performance."

The researchers found a positive correlation between unit "voice climate," team performance and individual performance. "Voice climate" is the extent to which a member of a team is encouraged to speak up and make suggestions in the workplace. Team members who feel they can speak up also feel more empowered and perform better as individuals.

"Our findings also include words of caution for the design of empowerment interventions," said D'Innocenzo. "High levels of empowerment on the team, a shared perception, are insufficient for enhancing individual performance. Individuals have to also feel empowered on their own."

Prior research suggested that either individuals or their team need to feel empowered for employees to perform better.

"Empowered behaviors can lead to improvements in health care as many hospitals are trying to perform their missions with less staffing and empowerment is seen as a way to do more with less," said D'Innocenzo.

More information: L. DInnocenzo et al. Empowered to Perform: A Multilevel Investigation of the Influence of Empowerment on Performance in Hospital Units, *Academy of Management Journal* (2015). [DOI: 10.5465/amj.2013.1073](https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2013.1073)

Provided by Drexel University

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