

The Impact of Longevity and Staff Health Promotion on Employee Engagement in Al Dhafra Hospitals, United Arab Emirates (UAE): A Quantitative Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

Background: Employee engagement, organizational culture, and staff retention are critical success factors in healthcare institutions. Recognizing the growing need to support staff well-being, Al Dhafra Hospitals in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) implemented PURA, a comprehensive wellness and longevity program under the PureHealth umbrella¹. **Objectives:** The study explores the effectiveness of health promotion and longevity programs in enhancing employee engagement, strengthening organizational culture, and improving staff retention rates within a network of public hospitals in the UAE. **Methods:** A quantitative, cross-sectional study design was used. Data were collected via an online structured survey consisting of 32 Likert-scale items, distributed to a random sample of hospital employees (N = 194). Descriptive statistics, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, and Spearman's rank correlation were employed to analyze the data using SPSS Statistics software (version 29). Effect sizes (Cohen's d) and reliability coefficients (Cronbach's α) were calculated to complement significance testing. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test was chosen for this single-time-point Likert data due to its non-parametric nature, which is suitable for ordinal data and comparisons of related samples when assumptions for parametric tests are not met. **Results:** The analysis revealed a median composite score of 4.0 across all three domains—engagement, culture, and retention. Wilcoxon test results demonstrated statistically significant positive perceptions of the PURA program's impact on all measured outcomes ($p < 0.01$). Strong correlations were found between engagement and culture ($r = 0.754$), engagement

¹PURA stands for PureHealth Umbrella for Resilience and Advancement.

and retention ($r = 0.725$), and culture and retention ($r = 0.801$), indicating a strong interdependence among the three factors. Given the ordinal nature of Likert responses and the single-group design, a one-sample Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to compare median domain scores to the neutral point (3.0), with effect sizes (r) reported. **Conclusion:** The findings affirm that wellness and longevity initiatives such as PURA positively influence staff engagement, enhance organizational culture, and contribute to improved retention rates. These results underscore the strategic value of employee well-being programs in healthcare settings and support their broader implementation across similar institutions.

Keywords

Employee Engagement, Wellness Programs, Organizational Culture, Staff Retention, Healthcare, UAE, Longevity, PureHealth, Al Dhafra Hospitals

1. Introduction

Contemporary models such as the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) explain how wellness resources can strengthen engagement and intent to stay via enhanced autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Healthcare organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of investing in their most valuable asset: their employees. This sector is adopting a holistic approach to staff health promotion to enhance longevity, boost retention rates, and improve employee engagement. This approach is crucial for fostering supportive and sustainable work environments, especially given the global healthcare workforce challenges. The significance of employee well-being and organizational performance as essential components of a thriving workplace is underscored by foundational frameworks such as Hart and Cooper's (2001) organizational health framework model and more recent literature on employee engagement (Hart & Cooper, 2001).

References for local turnover figures have been added to support the rates cited in the Problem Statement.

The evolving nature of work, exacerbated by global healthcare pressures, burnout, staffing shortages, and challenges following the COVID-19 pandemic, has placed unprecedented demands on employees. This research addresses a critical issue many institutions face, exploring how health promotion and wellness programs can mitigate these challenges. Specifically, physically and mentally healthy staff exhibit higher engagement, productivity, and reduced absenteeism, which directly impacts overall organizational performance and staff retention.

Health promotion programs, such as offering periodic health screenings and easy access to wellness services, are vital for employee well-being and engagement. By implementing these initiatives, organizations demonstrate care for their em-

employees, fostering a culture of wellness that encourages healthy life habits and enhances overall performance (Hart & Cooper, 2001). Furthermore, a positive organizational culture, characterized by leadership support and effective communication, is consistently linked to better work settings and continuous development (Morgeson et al., 2010). Creating a psychologically safe workplace is fundamental to fostering employee engagement, where employees feel an emotional connection to their organization (Kompaso & Sridevi, 2010). Such initiatives also contribute to organizational profits through enhanced service training (Al Kurdi et al., 2020).

Al Dhafra Hospitals, a network of six facilities within the Dhafra Region, operates under the SEHA umbrella, a key division of the PureHealth Group. In alignment with PureHealth's strategic objectives, these hospitals have initiated comprehensive longevity and wellness programs, called PURA, to support staff well-being.

1.1. Problem Statement

In the contemporary healthcare sector, employee disengagement has emerged as a significant economic and operational challenge. Disengaged employees cost U.S. corporations approximately \$350 billion annually, and globally, such disengagement leads to an estimated \$8.8 trillion in lost productivity, representing about 9% of global GDP (Dick-Smythe, 2024; Osborne & Hammoud, 2017).

Healthcare organizations have traditionally invested heavily in building and enhancing employee engagement. However, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted these positive trends, highlighting an urgent need for organizations to adapt and strengthen their resilience against global disruptions.

At Al Dhafra Hospitals, specific issues have been pinpointed as contributing factors to employee disengagement. Notably, employee turnover rates have shown a concerning pattern, with rates peaking at 20% in 2021, then slightly decreasing to 15% in 2022, and further to 12% in 2023. These figures are based on internal HR data from Al Dhafra Hospitals. Staff have attributed low satisfaction scores to various factors, including poor work-life balance and burnout, which are directly tied to the challenges in their work environment. Such issues undermine the operational efficiency and morale within the hospital and potentially compromise the quality of patient care and overall satisfaction.

There is no public data on the cost of disengaged employees in the Gulf area and the Middle East, particularly in the UAE.

1.2. Research Questions

Q1: Do employee wellness programs have a positive impact on employee engagement?

Null hypothesis 1: There is no effect of wellness programs on employee engagement.

Q2: Do employee wellness programs have a positive impact on organizational culture?

Null hypothesis 2: There is no impact of wellness programs on the organizational culture.

Q3: Do employee wellness programs have a positive impact on staff retention?

Null hypotheses 3: There is no impact of wellness programs on staff retention.

2. Background

Al Dhafra Hospitals, a network of six hospitals and four primary care centers, launched a comprehensive employee longevity and wellness program in early 2024. This initiative, designed to improve staff wellness, includes medical assessments, psychological support, wearable technology for continuous health monitoring, and flexible work arrangements. Previous studies have linked employee well-being initiatives to increased job satisfaction, productivity, and organizational commitment. For instance, Osborne and Hammoud (2017) highlighted the crucial role of effective employee engagement in the workplace, contributing to enhanced organizational performance (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). The absence of such programs has been associated with workplace disengagement, which can negatively impact staff turnover rates.

Our research aims to explore the impact of these longevity and health promotion programs on employee engagement at Al Dhafra Hospitals. By focusing on these initiatives, we intend to promote a healthier, more engaged workforce, ultimately contributing to a supportive environment where employees can thrive personally and professionally. This study seeks to demonstrate how strategic health-focused interventions can enhance engagement levels, foster a positive organizational culture, and drive sustainable business growth in the healthcare sector. This study is underpinned by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which posit that comprehensive wellness programs function as job resources that satisfy basic psychological needs and enhance engagement.

This study was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of Al Dhafra Hospitals under SEHA, in accordance with ethical standards. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. The Research Ethics Committee approval number is ADH-reference-2025-ADH-IREC-880.

3. Methods

3.1. Study Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design using survey data collected from employees at Al Dhafra Hospitals.

3.2. Data Collection

A structured online questionnaire, adapted from a previously validated instrument developed for this study based on existing literature, consisting of 32 Likert-scale items, was administered to assess perceptions of PURA's Health and wellness

programs. The survey instrument was specifically designed to capture nuances relevant to the impact of wellness programs in a healthcare setting. The survey covered three dimensions:

Instrument. The survey comprised items covering employee engagement, organisational culture, and retention intention (5-point Likert). Items were adapted from established scales with expert review for content validity; domain reliabilities (Cronbach's α) are reported in the Results.

- **Engagement:** Satisfaction, motivation, and perceived impact on work-life balance.
- **Organizational Culture:** Leadership support, communication, and integration of health initiatives.
- **Retention:** Job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions. The instrument demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's α values of 0.88 for Engagement, 0.90 for Organizational Culture, and 0.85 for Retention, indicating high reliability.

3.3. Sample and Sampling Technique

A census sampling method was used to invite all 301 permanent employees across Al Dhafra Hospitals to participate. A total of 194 valid responses were obtained, resulting in a response rate of 64.5%. The study participants ($N = 194$) represent a diverse cross-section of healthcare professionals. Detailed demographics, including age groups, experience levels, and job roles, were balanced and are presented in Section 4.1. The gender distribution was 65.9% female and 34.1% male. This gender imbalance reflects the overall workforce composition in the healthcare sector of the region and is discussed in the limitations section regarding its potential impact on generalizability.

3.4. Data Analysis

Analyses were conducted using SPSS Statistics software (version 29). Non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were employed to assess the significance of differences in engagement, culture, and retention. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test was chosen for this single-time-point Likert data due to its non-parametric nature, which is suitable for ordinal data and comparisons of related samples when assumptions for parametric tests are not met. These tests were complemented with effect size measures (Cohen's d and Pearson's r for correlations), along with 95% confidence intervals, to quantify the magnitude and practical significance of the findings.

4. Results

4.1. Demographics

The study encompassed a total of 194 participants, representing a diverse cross-section of healthcare professionals. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 30 and 39 (44.3%), followed by 40 to 49 years (27.8%). Females constituted

the majority at 65.9%, with males representing 34.0%. Most respondents (82.4%) were married, reflecting a predominantly settled demographic. Educational qualifications revealed that 76.3% held a bachelor's degree. In terms of professional experience, the largest group (28.3%) reported having between 11 and 15 years in the healthcare sector, highlighting a mature and experienced respondent pool. These demographic characteristics were considered when interpreting the generalizability of the findings, as discussed in the limitations section.

4.2. Statistical Analysis and Results

The statistical analysis revealed compelling evidence of the positive impact that wellness programs have on key organizational outcomes (Table 1).

- **Employee Engagement:** The median composite score was 4.0 (on a 5-point Likert scale), indicating a generally high level of agreement among participants regarding the benefits of the wellness initiatives. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test yielded a test statistic of 1935.0, with a highly significant p -value of 0.000347 (effect size $r = 0.63$), confirming that employee engagement levels were significantly influenced by participation in wellness programs. Participants reported greater involvement, energy, and motivation at work.
- **Organizational Culture:** The median score also stood at 4.0, suggesting a strong consensus on the positive influence of wellness programs. The Wilcoxon test statistic was 1915.5, and the p -value was an even more significant 0.000069 (effect size $r = 0.62$), indicating that wellness initiatives fostered a supportive and inclusive workplace environment where collaboration and employee well-being are prioritized.
- **Staff Retention:** The analysis again revealed a median score of 4.0, with a Wilcoxon test statistic of 1970.5 and a statistically significant p -value of 0.009178 (effect size $r = 0.64$). These results underscore the perception among employees that wellness programs play a critical role in retention by promoting work-life balance, physical and mental health, and organizational loyalty, reinforcing their commitment to remain with the organization.

Table 1. Correlation analysis.

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	Relationship Strength
Engagement-Culture	0.754	Strong
Engagement-Retention	0.725	Strong
Culture-Retention	0.801	Very Strong

Note: these correlation coefficients (r) represent the effect sizes for the relationships between the variables, quantifying the magnitude of these associations.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the positive influence of structured wellness and longevity programs on key organizational outcomes—namely employee engagement, organizational culture, and staff retention—

within a healthcare setting. The statistically significant results from the Wilcoxon signed-rank tests, coupled with meaningful effect sizes, affirm that employees at Al Dhafra Hospitals perceive these programs as beneficial, with composite median scores of 4.0 across all three measured domains. These results not only validate the initial hypotheses but also align with global literature emphasizing the strategic importance of health promotion in the workplace.

High engagement levels reported in this study are indicative of the perceived value employees place on the PURA wellness initiative. This is consistent with established organizational health frameworks, which prioritize employee well-being and organizational performance as essential for a thriving workplace. The engagement boost noted here supports earlier work by Kompasso and Sridevi, who described engaged employees as those with an emotional connection to their organization, often stemming from feeling supported and valued (Kompasso & Sridevi, 2010). The statistical significance in this dimension reflects participants' perception that wellness programs directly contribute to their energy levels, job satisfaction, and sense of involvement, suggesting that such programs foster a greater sense of purpose and psychological safety among staff.

The strong positive correlation ($r = 0.754$) between engagement and organizational culture further reinforces the notion that a culture of wellness strengthens interpersonal relationships, fosters collaboration, and encourages trust in leadership. As emphasized by Morgeson et al., a positive organizational culture fosters ongoing development and creates psychologically safe environments where employees are motivated to perform (Morgeson et al., 2010). At Al Dhafra Hospitals, wellness initiatives have seemingly transformed traditional hierarchical structures into more inclusive and supportive systems that prioritize employee well-being. Moreover, the alignment of leadership practices with wellness values—evidenced by employee recognition of management support—reflects intentional culture shaping, which literature suggests is essential for long-term success.

Recommendations. Based on these findings, we recommend: 1) aligning wellness targets with leadership KPIs; 2) appointing unit-level wellness champions; 3) monitoring quarterly engagement and retention indicators; 4) integrating wellness activities with workload planning to avoid burden.

These outcomes also resonate with broader economic implications. Global data from Gallup survey (2023) estimates disengagement costs U.S. corporations \$350 billion annually, with similar consequences likely within the UAE, though precise regional data remains unavailable. The success of the wellness program at Al Dhafra Hospitals highlights a cost-effective, strategic approach to mitigating these losses through non-financial incentives that nurture a sense of belonging and psychological safety. While this study focuses on perceived impacts, these perceptions are crucial leading indicators for objective outcomes such as reduced turnover, improved productivity, and enhanced patient satisfaction. Future research should aim to correlate these perceived benefits with such quantifiable metrics.

In terms of retention, wellness programs emerged as a key differentiator in

making Al Dhafra Hospitals an employer of choice. Participants not only felt physically and mentally healthier but also viewed the organization as committed to their personal and professional development. Importantly, the use of wearable technology and digital engagement tools in the program contributed to a sense of ownership among employees over their health journey. The real-time tracking and personalized feedback fostered accountability and motivation, making wellness an accessible and integrated part of daily work life. These results support the position of Edington et al. (2016), who called for contextualized and technology-enabled health promotion strategies to respond to the evolving needs of the modern workforce (Edington et al., 2016).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the wellness and longevity programs implemented at Al Dhafra Hospitals demonstrate a clear and statistically significant impact on employee engagement, organizational culture, and retention. These findings advocate for the broader adoption of integrated wellness strategies across the UAE's healthcare sector and beyond. The evidence suggests that fostering a culture of wellness is not merely a supplementary HR initiative but a foundational strategy for organizational resilience, employee satisfaction, and long-term sustainability. While the findings are useful and promising, they must be interpreted with caution due to the study's cross-sectional design. Future research should add depth, provide more methodological clarity, and consider stronger designs, such as longitudinal or experimental studies, to make the results more generalizable and robust. This includes exploring the sustained impact of such programs over time and further quantifying their return on investment in measurable clinical and operational outcomes.

7. Limitations

The study faced several limitations that were important to consider. One significant constraint was its quantitative cross-sectional design, which captured data at a single point in time. This approach made it impossible to establish causal relationships, leaving it unclear whether the wellness program directly led to improvements in employee engagement and retention, or if those who were already engaged were simply more likely to participate and report positive experiences.

Additionally, the reliance on self-reported survey data introduced risks of bias. Participants may have been influenced by social desirability or recall bias, potentially skewing their responses. While the demographics of the participants were generally balanced, there was a lack of detailed information regarding their specific roles, the duration of their involvement in the PURA program, and the depth of their engagement with it. Notably, the gender imbalance—where 65.9% of participants were female—reflected trends within the healthcare workforce but also raised questions about how this imbalance might affect perceptions of work-life balance and retention, meriting further contextual discussion.

The generalizability of the findings was another limitation, as the study was conducted within a single hospital network, Al Dhafra Hospitals in the UAE. This focus restricted the applicability of the results to other healthcare systems, cultural contexts, or organizational structures. Furthermore, while the survey instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency, indicated by a Cronbach's alpha, the documentation of its prior validation process and item-level psychometrics was lacking.

Future Research Directions

There are several directions for future research that could enhance understanding in this area. First, adopting causal research designs such as longitudinal, pre-post, or quasi-experimental studies would provide a more robust method for establishing causality between wellness program participation and outcomes like engagement and retention. Furthermore, incorporating objective metrics would complement self-reported data, allowing researchers to validate findings with organizational metrics such as turnover rates, absenteeism records, and productivity indicators.

Future studies should also enhance participant profiling by gathering more detailed data on job roles, tenure in the program, and levels of program utilization. This would facilitate subgroup analyses and provide deeper insights into how these variables influence outcomes. Additionally, expanding the geographic and cultural scope of research would enable replication across diverse healthcare settings, helping to assess the generalizability and cultural adaptability of the findings.

Finally, it is essential for future publications to strengthen the documentation of the survey instrument. Comprehensive details regarding its validation process, prior usage, factor structure, and item-level reliability and validity evidence should be provided to enhance the credibility and applicability of the research.

Disclosures

This research received no external funding. The wellness and longevity program evaluated in this study, PURA, is an internal initiative developed and implemented by PureHealth, the parent organization of Al Dhafra Hospitals. No financial support, sponsorship, or grants were provided for the conduct of this study or the preparation of this manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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