



# Existing Problems and Improvement Plan of Medical Personnel Salary in China

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## Abstract

How much should medical personnel be paid in China? This is an issue that has been discussed all along. With the normalization of the prevention and control of COVID-19 epidemic in China, the hard work and increasing pressure of medical personnel are obvious to all. In order to maximize the incentive to medical personnel and avoid the double pressure of Finance and work, the salary system needs some improvement measures. This paper focuses on the current situation and existing problems of medical personnel's salary in China, combined with the research and analysis of medical personnel's salary in western countries, summarizes the systems and methods that should be followed by the payment of medical personnel's salary in China, and gives solutions, so that medical personnel can truly become a group with high level, high pay, high position and high income.

## Keywords

Medical personnel, salary, existing problems, improvement

## 1. Introduction

As a great worker of rescuing the dying and healing the injured, the salary level of medical personnel has always been the focus of the society and the public. In fact, the salary level of doctors in China is not optimistic. Since the COVID-19 epidemic swept the world in 2020, medical disputes and medical injuries have occurred frequently in the past two years. Medical personnel from large-scale comprehensive public hospitals are also undertaking the double requirements of business volume and scientific research and teaching, and the pressure on medical personnel has increased sharply. Medical personnel bear too much work pressure and relatively low salary level, which makes their job satisfaction low, which not only makes it difficult to motivate doctors, but also restricts the development of the hospital to a certain extent.

For medical personnel, if they can get a more reasonable and sufficient salary to satisfy them, excellent personnel will be more inclined to actively complete daily medical work and create value in public hospitals, which not only promotes the salary incentive effect and achieves a more fair state, but also improves the quality of medical services, achieves sustainable development for the hospital and takes into account efficiency. For doctors, after receiving a reasonable salary, they can not only improve their ability, but also realize their self-worth in the process; For the hospital, under the active work of doctors, not only can the business volume be increased, the reputation of the hospital be accumulated and the competitive advantage be expanded, but also the sustainable development can be further realized.

Firstly, this paper introduces the salary status of medical personnel in public hospitals in China and abroad, and compares them. It clarifies that the salary level of medical personnel in China still needs to be improved, and analyzes various factors. Based on the salary incentive theory, this paper puts forward reasonable suggestions and methods on how to make medical staff pay enough to play the role of salary incentive.

## 1. Salary of medical personnel in China

### 1.1 Salary of medical personnel in the past

Since ancient times, in China, doctors have been taught privately, so they have a relatively high threshold and quality, and the treatment of doctors is acceptable. This situation has continued to the Republic of China. In the Qing Dynasty, according to historical records and previous scholars' conjecture, generally speaking, the income level of doctors was much higher than that of private school teachers at that time, but it was far lower than that of the chief executive in the grass-roots administrative units. Practicing medicine can at least guarantee a family's food and clothing, support their children's education and participate in scientific examinations. Once medical practice is suspended for a period of time, there will be no source and guarantee of income (Wang Min, 2012). Therefore, it can be inferred that the treatment of doctors at that time was not rich, but it was still good. Since the founding of new China, the salary system of public hospitals has been continuously reformed. With the reform, the salary system has gradually become complex and comprehensive. The general direction is to better motivate doctors and reflect their labor value (Feng Hongjie & Hao Zhimei, 2019).

### 1.2 Determinants and current situation of medical personnel salary

Now, the income composition of doctors is generally basic salary + bonus + additional income. The additional income includes the incentive of being invited to participate in conferences or lectures, the income of being sent to participate in consultation or appraisal work, the contribution fee for compiling journals or books, and the salary for additional administrative posts. It can be seen that most young doctors with relatively little experience will hardly get this share of extra income. The basic salary and bonus will depend on the policy. The reform of the salary system of public hospitals has been carried out since 2009. Its contents are as follows: the basic salary of public institutions is directly regulated by the government, and the salary level of doctors in the same work unit is mainly determined by factors such as educational background, professional title and scientific research (Zeng Lijin, 2022).

The basic salary of doctors comes from the financial allocation of the government. Combined with practical factors, there is a large gap between the basic salary standards of economically developed areas and economically underdeveloped areas; As for the bonus in the doctor's income, the doctor's work unit, that is, the public hospital, has greater autonomy, and can formulate a suitable salary incentive system according to its own business situation and development strategy (Zeng Lijin, 2022).

It can be seen that the doctor's salary is mixed with various factors. The three principles that can be summarized are: the difference of development level in different regions determines the difference of the total income of doctors; The salary of doctors in the same area is determined according to the level, but to a large extent, it is determined by the salary distribution policy within the hospital; Some experienced doctors have the opportunity to receive additional allowances. On the whole, the current salary level of medical personnel is consistent with the local economic development level, and slightly higher than the local average salary, which is basically equal to the salary of employees of organs and institutions in the same region (such as civil servants and police).

### 1.3 Salary data of medical personnel in China in recent years

For four consecutive years from 2016 to 2019, the school of public health of Beijing Union Medical College led a survey on the salary level of more than 24,000 doctors in tertiary hospitals across the country. The results show that the average salary of doctors in tertiary hospitals in China was 122,200 yuan in the same year, and the average income of urban workers in China was 82,600 yuan in the same year. The salary of doctors was 1.48 times of the average income of urban workers, and it has been basically maintained at 1.5 times in recent years. The specific values are shown in the following table (Zhang Chunyu, Ma Jing, Hu Linlin, Wu YINUO, Wu Shichao, Guo Jing, Zhao Qi & Liu Yuanli, 2020).

**Table 1. Changes in remuneration of doctors in tertiary hospitals in China from 2016 to 2019**

| Time | Average salary of medical staff in tertiary hospitals (unit: ten thousand yuan) | Average income of urban workers (unit: ten thousand yuan) | The ratio of the average income between medical staff and urban workers |
|------|---|---|---|
| 2016 | 9.57  | 6.21  | 1.54  |
| 2017 | 12.98   | 6.76  | 1.92  |
| 2018 | 11.18   | 7.45  | 1.50  |
| 2019 | 12.22   | 8.26  | 1.48  |

Data source: Zhang Chunyu, Ma Jing. (2020). Analysis on the current situation and trend of doctors' salary income in Chinese public hospitals. *China Research Hospital*, 27-31 + 136-141.

This survey is mainly aimed at the medical personnel of the three-level public hospitals in the first tier cities and provincial capital cities. Their income level is already high among the doctors in China. The salary level of medical personnel not involved will only be lower.

#### **1.4 The existing problems of medical personnel salary in China**

In recent years, there have been one after another calls for reform in the medical industry. The reform of the medical system has been going on for many years and has not stopped. This shows that the reform needs further deepening and improvement. Under the normalized prevention and control of the epidemic, it is impossible to attract more excellent talents to study medicine with too low salary. This is a lesson from the past: there are a large number of doctors in pediatrics, gynecology and obstetrics, emergency department, anesthesiology department and psychiatry department, because the salary of doctors in these departments is the same as that of other departments, but their workload is larger than that of doctors in other departments. In this way, a vicious circle is formed: doctors in some departments are scarce, and the remaining doctors are responsible for the workload of the missing doctors, resulting in more and more workload, and no doctor is willing to choose these departments.

Therefore, for Chinese doctors, the biggest problem is that the salary is obviously too low and it is difficult to get more for more work. Although practitioners of many professions think that their income is not high enough, due to the particularity, loftiness, busyness and tension, the income of doctors cannot be low, nor can it be comparable with other professions.

The training of medical students takes a long time. Taking the training mechanism in mainland China as an example, medical students need to go through five years of undergraduate and three years of master's degree before they can reach the qualification level of doctors. In some regions, standardized training will be added for about two years. Some medical students need to spend three years or more to study for their doctorate, and go to the United States, Germany and other medically developed countries for further study to obtain better training. At the same time, the cost of cultivating a doctor can not be underestimated: most medical students can only maintain their personal food and clothing during their postgraduate, regular training and doctoral studies, and there is almost no additional income. This period is the most critical period for cultivating an excellent doctor. Therefore, in order to better motivate doctors, it is necessary to increase their income.

Compared with other professions, the average salary of medical personnel in hospitals in first tier cities can reach 1.5 times of the average income of local employees. The salary of medical personnel in hospitals and small public hospitals in other cities will be lower, and the salary gap between doctors in Europe and America is relatively large. In Hong Kong, China, the salary of medical personnel is also quite high, which can reach more than three times of the average salary more than 20 years ago (Jiang Yun, 1999).

## **2. The current situation of international medical staff compensation**

### **2.1 International Hospital ranking and decisive factors**

According to the world hospital ranking list in 2022 [from the official account of the health sector], seven of the top 20 hospitals are American hospitals, including Mayo Clinic Rochester (Mayo Clinic), Cleveland Clinic (Cleveland Clinic), Massachusetts General Hospital (Massachusetts General Hospital), the Johns Hopkins Hospital (Johns Hopkins Hospital) and so on. Since the scoring system of the world's hospitals is basically composed of medical treatment, teaching and scientific research, the top hospitals also meet the characteristics of leading in all aspects in the world. The medical staff of these hospitals only need to consider the research technology and how to treat the disease. The salary system tilted towards the medical staff allows them to have no worries at home. The high salary also attracts more excellent talents to enter the industry, forming a virtuous circle. These hospitals are at the world's top level in terms of medical treatment and scientific research. At the same time, the doctors in the hospital also have the pioneering ability to decide how to treat a certain disease. Provide evidence for the naming of a disease.

### **2.2 Mayo Clinic salary system**

Taking the first ranked Mayo Clinic as a reference, Mayo Clinic respects the labor value of doctors and makes the salary affordable to the long-term training and learning of medical students. Taking 2017 as an example, the total income of Mayo Clinic in that year was US \$12 billion, and the total expenditure was US \$11.3 billion, of which 65% (US \$7.3 billion) was used to pay employees' wages and benefits, and US \$535 million was used to pay employees' pension plans. In terms of salary system, the salary of all employees of Mayo Clinic is based on the pure

salary system, which is not linked to the outpatient volume, operation volume, scientific research output, performance and medical quality, but only related to the years of entering the hospital. The salary increases with the increase of years, and it is in the leading position in the medical industry. The words are all coming from a Wechat public number called Healthcare Dive in 2017. The advantages of the doctor salary system are that doctors do not need to worry about business volume, reduce conflicts of interest with hospitals and patients, concentrate on serving patients, and attract more excellent talents to join the medical industry (Wang Xiaohu, Dai Xiaozhi, Li dufei, Chang Jin & Chen Guanghui, 2021; Curtright, Stolp-Smith, & Edell, 2000).

### 2.3 Salary level of medical personnel in various countries

At present, the medical industry in the United States is dominated by private hospitals and supplemented by public hospitals. The salaries of medical personnel in the public hospital system mainly come from government grants, and the level is mostly above the medium level of various social industries. Among them, the income of doctors is 1.8-6.2 times of the social wage, and the income of nurses is mostly 0.9-1.5 times of the average wage (Liu Huifeng, 2016). Some scholars also pointed out that the annual salary of American doctors is 3-8 times that of ordinary people (Wang Yanzhong & Gao Wenwen, 2016).

In Britain, doctors belong to the high-income group. The salaries of medical staff in public hospitals are also funded by the government. In the UK, the salary of interns is already equal to that of British civil servants. According to the length of service, the salary of highly experienced doctors such as specialists and consultants is 1.6-3.1 times of that of interns (Niu Xinqiao, 2020) and 2-3 times of that of civil servants (Wang Yanzhong & Gao Wenwen, 2016). In addition to salary, the non monetary incentives given to public hospital doctors in the UK are also quite generous: at least 1.5 months/year of paid leave, generous government subsidies and welfare, and advanced study leave with great humanistic care (Niu Xinqiao, 2020).

In addition to the United States and the United Kingdom, the salary of medical personnel in public hospitals in Australia is basically more than twice the social average salary level, while the salary of medical personnel in Brazil is generally 3-4 times or even more than the social average salary level (Wang Yanzhong & Gao Wenwen, 2016).

## 3. Standards to be followed for salary payment of medical personnel

The salary level of a profession should be determined by such factors as education background, social orientation, degree of hard work, working hours and contributions. Doctors in first tier city hospitals generally have a master's degree or above. Their position in society is similar to that of the police and teachers. They can save lives, protect people's stability and maintain social stability; At the level of hard work and working hours, doctors are one of the few professions that require long-term continuous work and 24-hour standby; It is needless to say that the contribution to society can not be separated from the development of medicine and the daily work of doctors, such as the extension of human life expectancy, the improvement of physical quality and the maintenance of the normal operation of society. Based on the above factors, the salary of doctors should be equal to or higher than the salary of police, teachers and other professions, and not lower than the average salary of local talents with the same educational background.

The salary standard of doctors in the world can also be used as a reference: the salary level of doctors in the United States, Germany, Britain and other countries is about 1.5-6 times of the average salary level of local employees. In China, there are also cities that reasonably raise the salary of their local doctors to about three times the average income of urban workers, that is, Sanming City, Fujian Province, where the famous Sanming medical reform is located. After the Sanming medical reform, the salary level of medical personnel in Sanming public hospital is about 3-5 times of the average salary level of the local society.

At present, in China, the average salary of medical personnel in public hospitals in first tier cities is about 1.5-2 times of the average social income. The rest of the cities are different, but they are generally 1.5 times or less of the average salary of local employees. Based on the above data, it is an ideal figure to increase the salary of doctors to about three times the average social level (Wei Zining, 2016).

## 4. A feasible scheme to improve the salary of medical staff

In order to improve the current situation that the salaries of doctors in China are not high enough, we should start with financial allocation, attach importance to young talents, reasonably plan the working hours, appropriately expand medical enrollment and improve medical teaching.

#### **4.1 Increase financial allocation**

At present, the salary sources of medical personnel in China are mainly financial allocation and hospital performance, of which financial allocation accounts for less and hospital performance accounts for more. Performance is also linked to business volume and drug use catalogue. However, when doctors pursue business volume too much and hope to receive more patients and issue expensive drugs, patient satisfaction will inevitably decline, and the personal reputation of doctors and hospitals will also be damaged. Therefore, it is not a wise decision to hope to improve performance level. On the other hand, the government needs to increase financial allocation.

#### **4.2 Learn from successful cases**

Equally important and effective means are: draw lessons from the western countries' medical personnel salary and doctor training mechanism represented by the United States and the successful case of China's medical reform - Sanming medical reform, and formulate the medical personnel salary payment standard and daily performance system that adapt to China's national conditions.

Both the pure salary system adopted by Mayo Clinic and the annual salary system adopted by Sanming hospital essentially increase the salary of doctors within a reasonable range, and achieve the effect of gradually decoupling the volume of diagnosis and treatment business from the salary, so that doctors do not need to strive for the quantity of diagnosis and treatment business and ignore the quality, so as to better serve patients. At present, the bonus of doctors in public hospitals in China is closely linked to the business volume, and the bonus generally accounts for more than 60% of the income, which makes it difficult for doctors to serve the patients' health wholeheartedly and make practical medical behavior as the health maintainer of patients. However, when the medical industry gradually transits to benign competition with the sustainable development of China's economy and society, the state pays more attention to the medical industry and the deepening of the reform of the medical and health system, the salary system of hospitals and doctors should be adjusted and improved in a timely manner, so that doctors can return to the social standard of treating diseases and saving people (Gao Qiang & Xiao Jincheng, 2019).

When applied to hospitals in China, the doctor's salary system of Mayo Clinic should be based on the current income level of social strata in China and the reasonable salary level generally recognized by medical personnel in China (Wang Xiaohu, Dai Xiaozhi, Li dufei, Chang Jin & Chen Guanghui, 2021), while the annual salary system of doctors should carefully examine the actual pay of doctors to avoid free riding. At the same time, it is necessary to study the workload assessment standard for each doctor to obtain a fixed salary and the cost source for ensuring the long-term implementation of the salary system. A high-level salary system, coupled with strict access qualification management and fierce job competition, can, to a certain extent, return the medical industry to respect the labor value of doctors and return doctors to the social standard of treating patients and saving people.

#### **4.3 Increase non salary incentives**

In addition, non remunerative incentives can also be added to improve doctors' job satisfaction. Most of the medical staff in public hospitals belong to high-level intellectuals, and the nature of their work is both technical and professional. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory points out that meeting the needs of individuals to be respected and to realize their self-worth can stimulate their enthusiasm for work.

This kind of encouragement, the first is humanistic care: respect the attitude in daily life, and buy some fruits or desserts as afternoon tea on holidays; At the same time, the hospital environment needs to be improved, and the entry-level security inspection system can be added to ensure the safety of the hospital and eliminate the worries of medical personnel.

The second is to pay attention to the fairness and rationality of shift scheduling, try to balance the proportion of full-time shift and night shift of each person, and respect the personal typesetting intention. At the same time, the administrative department of the hospital can also communicate with the personnel shortage department, confirm the personnel shortage, properly lower the recruitment threshold, and recruit new employees for the personnel shortage department without affecting the salary level of the medical personnel of the original department, so as to ease the busy degree of work.

Third, in addition to the salary payment method based on wages, it is also necessary to respect the personal development of medical personnel, increase their opportunities to study abroad, optimize their working conditions, and give spiritual incentives to flexibly meet the flexible needs of medical personnel in different positions, so as to guide and activate their active and efficient working behaviors.

## 5. Summary and sublimation

A high salary is necessary for the profession of doctor. The purpose of doctors should be to serve the people. If the people can directly go to see a doctor without having to bear too much medical expenses and the government is responsible for paying doctors, then doctors do not need to worry about income and can serve the patients wholeheartedly. In such an ideal situation, the doctor-patient disputes will be reduced to a large extent, because there will not be too many disputes between the interests of both parties, whether at the interest level or the moral level. At the same time, it can avoid the phenomenon of medical corruption and maintain the image of doctors, hospitals and the medical industry.

The saying "to persuade people to learn medicine is not only a common saying, but also reflects the current situation of medical workers in China: doctors have high work intensity, but they do not get much, and their pay and return are seriously out of proportion. This is also the direct reflection of the public that China must have medical reform. It is the so-called person who holds a salary for everyone, and he cannot be frozen to death in the wind and snow. Life is priceless. If medical personnel really work for the people and the society, their remuneration should be equal to their pay. As "angels in white", medical personnel should not worry about their income. The salary of medical personnel is one of the important aspects of the medical and health system reform. High salary can attract excellent talents and top talents, and these people can provide the most valuable services. Only when high-level talents and high salary can medical institutions accelerate their development, better help more patients, and implement the healthy China policy.

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