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Working conditions of physicians in private health care sector in Turkey

Once Health Care Transformation Program was put into practice in the year 2003, the health care sector was launched into the open market and public sector investments in the field of health care have rapidly increased. Actually 35% of health services are provided by private health sector. The number of private sector hospitals recorded as 271 in the year 2002 has risen in the year 2016 to 565 by an increase of 109%. In parallel to such increase, the number of visits at private sector hospitals has increased by %1149 reaching to 71.2 million, whereas the number of inpatients has risen by 628% and the number of surgeries by 585%. According to year 2016 data, about 20% of 145 thousand physicians working in Turkey are employed by private health care sector.

The private sector has built up and grown fat within this period of 14 year, as working conditions of physicians and all health care employees have become harder. Factors such as hard and tiresome working conditions, overmuch burden of night duties, in appropriate working environments, absence of sufficient vacations, overwork burden even on official holidays, sales pressure and lack of job security are threatening physicians' health employed in private sector hospitals and cause them to exhaust.

Physicians experiencing an intensive exploitation of labor are forced to work at low salary levels, employed as contactors, without any job security and any labor union rights.

Employment conditions of physicians have changed, with decreased remuneration

In recent years, fixed salary rates paid to physicians in private sector hospitals are even lower than those paid in public sector. Social security contributions are paid at lower rates by employers, consequently leading to lower retirement pays and severance payments in future.

Another issue in private sector hospitals is delayed payment of salaries. The number of physicians, who cannot receive their salaries for months, hence cannot quit their job hospital to avoid risking their outstanding claims and continue to work for free in their hospitals in a vicious circle, increases day by day.

The legislation in effect for the employment relationship between physicians employed in private sector health care institutions and their employers has been amended unlawfully by enacting bylaws. Thus, physicians employed under service contracts had to open businesses as legal entity companies, in order to receive their enumerations by issuing invoices in return of their labor. As the result of the change made in the relation between social security and remuneration, employees are subject to, now physicians have to pay their social security contributions by their own, who in other words, as contracted employees have be self-employed and pay corporate taxes. By this manner, physicians have lost their rights as wageworkers or laborers.

Working conditions in private sector became harder, with longer working hours

The major factor in working conditions becoming harder is longer working hours. According to Labor Law, weekly working hours have been set as 45 hours. Work exceeding weekly working hours specified by Labor Law has been defined as overtime work and is subject to worker's consent. Nevertheless, this consent for overtime works on weekly basis, which could be obtained for different reasons, was considered as insufficient, and further restriction has been brought in, which limits total working time as 270 hours on annual basis.

Weekly working hours is far above 45 hours in private sector hospitals. Many physicians have to go work to their hospitals beyond regular working hours, to host patient visits overnight and on holidays or to attend as consultant physician. Due to staff restrictions at health care institutions or for financial reasons, employers do not hire additional physicians for shift services, to work beyond regular work hours, making physicians working conditions tougher undertaking such shifts. Due to remuneration of physicians on pro rata basis at private sector health care institutions, physicians tend to overwork for longer hours by accepting large number of patient visits, in order to increase their income.

Working at more than one private health care institution legally allowed now

By issuing a decree in this respect, it was unlawfully allowed private hospital owners to force physicians to work at a second workplace, at a chain brand hospital or another contracted health care institution. This means that private hospital staff physicians are becoming dependent on their hospital employers' decisions, but not on their own consent.

Holidays are now regular working days at private hospitals

Due to employment problems, physicians working at private sector hospitals are forced to accept longer working hours also including holidays. This regulation causes and other health care employees spend their official state holidays on their duty, since ambulatory care services on holidays are now allowed by the Social Security Institution.

Consequences

Since health care has become a field where private sector capital tries to maximize profits, this leads to working conditions such as busier work intensity, lower salaries, longer working hours, lack of security and flexible working for health care employees.

In this regard, the decision making process in health care services has now become dependent on the private sector but not on physicians. We think neither health care employees nor the society will benefit from that the private sector capital is becoming decisive for the relation between health care employees and those receiving health services.

We consider that such circumstances will lead to health issues and occupational burnout, for physicians employed at private sector health care institutions under hard and exhausting working conditions without social security.

Source:

Özel sağlık sektöründe çalışma ve ücretlendirme biçimleri Türk Tabipler Birliği, Özel Hekimlik Kolu 2018, İstanbul

Raşit Tükel, Özel sağlık kuruluşlarında hekimlik. <http://www.tipdunyasi.dr.tr/2018/05/ozel-saglik-kuruluslarinda-hekimlik/>