

New forms of work organization in the hospital sector: improvement of working conditions, health and quality – experiences of cooperation between the social partners in the hospitals in Denmark

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The purpose of this report is to describe the connection between improvements in the working organization, working conditions and health and quality (from the patients' point of view) on the basis of the experiences of hospitals in Denmark. These experiences were made possible by cooperation between the various social partners in the hospitals (doctors, nurses, blue-collar workers and the employers).

The report will focus on the following projects:

1. The Service-employee project in Frederiksborg county

More than 1,000 service workers (cleaners, porters, hospital orderlies, assistants) with no or very little education are trained to be overall "service employees": broader and less tiring jobs, new work organization (teams), better wages and working conditions, better economy for the county and job creation. Job creation was initially established in the form of job rotation: while existing employees attended training courses they were replaced in the workplace by unemployed people.

The project was a partnership between the county (as the employer) and the unions. All partners involved (the county, management, all employees including nurses and similar groups, and the patients) were generally quite satisfied with the results: it was a real win-win result for everybody.

The project is mentioned in the EC's Green Paper on "partnership for new organization of work", June 1997, as an example of good practice.

A short presentation of the project, its content and results.

2. SUS – Partnership in Hospitals

SUS is the name of a Danish cooperation project between the social partners in the hospital sector. The project has been ongoing for a couple of years now and has focused on a total of 10 wards. The project is financed out of collective bargaining funds, the Ministry of Health and participating hospitals and organizations. It is a bottom-up project whose aim is to improve the organization of work and to develop the skills of all members of staff as a tool for improving the quality and productivity of hospitals. The conceptual framework is that of development work and the learning organization.

The SUS can be broken down into a number of inter-related elements:

- 10 wards trying to improve day-to-day life according to the above mentioned principles;

Working without limits ?
Re-organising work and reconsidering workers' health
PARALLEL WORKSHOPS

- evaluation and dissemination of good practice nationwide;
- a national website featuring good examples of how to improve work organization and a digitized scheme to improve individual and ward skills;
- European cooperation including a Leonardo-project, the establishment of social dialogue across the EU and a European website, www.eurocarenet.org

To summarize, the main issues of the SUS are to create better working conditions, a better organization of work, to develop skills and, as a result of this, better quality and higher productivity. It is also very important to create attractive jobs in the hospitals as they seek to attract skilled staff in a context where there is a general shortage of young and well-educated workers.

Preliminary results are improvements in culture, dialogue and cooperation in the wards covered by the project. A number of courses have been held on values, culture and common understanding to establish common goals for the services in the wards. The less educated ward employees (nurse-assistants, cleaners and porters) have had their jobs increased in scope and upgraded in terms of skills and there are examples of new forms of work organization and management. Some of the most active and committed project participants have small wage rises in local negotiations.

The websites are being developed and more and more examples of improvements in work organization etc. can be read on existing sites, including networking projects.

The highlights and outlook for continued cooperation will be presented.

The report finish with its conclusions and a statement of the challenges and possibilities for discussion.