

Research on the path to improving the quality of medical students' volunteer service based on the social system function model

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Abstract. Based on the current situation of medical students' volunteer service, this study introduces the theory of the social functional structure model (AGIL) into the research of the development system of medical students' volunteer service. By adopting a research form that integrates theory with practice, this paper analyzes the constraining factors in the economic system, political system, social community system, and cultural system within the development system of medical students' volunteer service. It then proposes pathways for further improvement of the quality of medical students' volunteer service from the four dimensions of adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency pattern maintenance.

Keywords: social system function analysis, medical students, volunteer service, quality improvement

1. Introduction

The spirit of volunteer service in China is summarized as “dedication, friendship, mutual assistance, and progress.” This is not only an embodiment of the core socialist values but also an important component of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics. Promoting the development of volunteer service is a key factor in fostering social harmony and progress. In the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized the need to “strengthen the construction of integrity and promote the institutionalization of volunteer service, enhancing awareness of social responsibility, rules, and dedication.” In the report of the 20th National Congress, he further stressed the importance of “encouraging and supporting individuals, enterprises, and social organizations with willingness and ability to actively participate in public welfare and charity activities.” The promulgation and implementation of the Regulations on Volunteer Service in 2017 also explicitly stipulated that schools, families, and society should jointly cultivate young people's awareness and capacity for volunteer service. As a group with professional skills, medical students' participation in volunteer service not only helps cultivate medical ethics, test and strengthen professional skills, but also fosters the spirit of labor and enhances the role of universities in serving society [1]. As a new force in society, medical students spread positive energy through volunteer service, creating a positive chain reaction, raising public awareness of volunteer service, and encouraging more people to join the ranks of volunteers, thereby gradually improving the overall level of medical services [2].

2. Current situation of medical students' volunteer service

In recent years, Chinese scholars have conducted explorations into medical students' volunteer service, making due contributions to its development in China. They have preliminarily established a volunteer service system for medical students, improved the content of volunteer service, and formed training models for medical volunteers, yielding diverse and multi-level research results [3-6]. However, there are still several issues: volunteer activities remain at a relatively superficial level of social welfare and convenience services, unable to fully leverage the professional advantages of medical students; there is a lack of targeted skills training, making it difficult to meet the increasingly diversified and specialized needs of society, which may cause activities to become formalistic; the system of volunteer service, rights protection, and incentive mechanisms still needs improvement to ensure the sustainability of service; and volunteer service among medical students is currently promoted in a top-down manner, mainly relying on administrative management, with organizations directly overseeing it. To some extent, such organizational mobilization can be regarded as an implicit compulsory order. Many participants are not volunteers in the true sense but engage in participation under organizational pressure rather than genuine “voluntarism” [7-10].

Therefore, while considerable achievements have been made, there are still many issues requiring in-depth study. As part of the broader social service system, medical students' volunteer service has social system functions and significance, and it is influenced by economic, political, community, and cultural systems. Thus, placing medical students' volunteer service under the lens of social system function allows for further exploration of its socialized development path and improvement in service quality.

3. Academic value of studying the development of medical students' volunteer service from the perspective of the social system function model

The renowned American sociologist Talcott Parsons proposed the AGIL model of social system functional analysis in 1953. He cross-analyzed from four research dimensions—economic system, political system, social community system, and cultural system—and concluded that any social (organizational) system must meet four basic functions to exist in society: Adaptation (A), Goal attainment (G), Integration (I), and Latency pattern maintenance (L) [11]. In recent years, the AGIL model has been widely applied in the study of the development paths of medicine and education in China, yielding certain research results [12-15]. Some scholars have also explored the development of volunteer service using the AGIL model [16-17], but no literature has yet been found that applies social system function analysis theory to conduct in-depth research on medical students' volunteer service.

Medical students' volunteer service systems also belong to the broader social system, and the theory and methodology of social system function analysis (AGIL) are equally applicable. The Adaptation (A) function refers to the medical student volunteer organization system maintaining contact with the external social environment, continuously adapting to changes to ensure the acquisition and allocation of useful resources. This means medical student volunteers need to adapt to changes in social demands, environments, institutions, and policies, achieving both social service value and self-improvement. The Goal attainment (G) function requires the system to have clear objectives and the ability to mobilize internal resources to achieve them. Medical students, therefore, serve society through volunteer service while also achieving the goal of promoting their own learning. The Integration (I) function refers to integrating all parts or factors of the medical student volunteer service system into a cohesive whole, allowing each part to contribute to the overall effect. Medical students, under the guidance and guarantee of policies, integrate resources from schools, hospitals, communities, and factories to achieve volunteer service goals. The Latency (L) function ensures the internalization and institutionalization of values and beliefs necessary to sustain the organizational system. Through honors, rewards, incentives, and media publicity, medical students achieve their personal social value while engaging in professional volunteer service, fostering a belief in serving the people.

4. Pathways for improving the quality of medical students' volunteer service from the perspective of social system function

4.1. Economic system of medical students' voluntary service (adaptive function)

In the process of participating in voluntary service, medical students need to adapt to changes in social needs, environment, systems and policies. This can be achieved through voluntary service training, strengthening the construction of voluntary service support systems, and enhancing social recognition of medical students' voluntary service.

4.1.1. Enhancing professional skills training for medical student volunteers

To improve the professional skills of medical student volunteers, it is necessary to strengthen professional skills training for them. Experienced doctors and medical experts should be invited to give lectures, as they can provide valuable clinical experience and professional guidance, thereby improving the volunteers' ability and level to participate in voluntary service. At the same time, the training effect of medical students should be evaluated regularly to ensure that the training content is consistent with actual needs, and the training plan should be adjusted based on feedback.

4.1.2. Strengthening the construction of social security functions for voluntary service

Schools should communicate with units in need of voluntary service to provide medical students with necessary medical supplies such as masks and gloves, so as to ensure their personal safety during voluntary service. Accident insurance for a single time or several days should be purchased for students participating in voluntary service to cover possible accidental injuries that may occur during the service process. In addition, welfare benefits such as transportation subsidies and meal subsidies should be provided to these students to reduce their economic burden and ensure that they can focus on voluntary service.

4.1.3. Improving legal protection

To improve the legal protection for medical student volunteers during voluntary service and ensure that their legitimate rights and interests are protected, it is necessary to clarify the legal status, rights and obligations of volunteers through local legislation. Voluntary service organizations should establish and improve a mechanism for protecting the rights and interests of volunteers to ensure that the legitimate rights and interests of volunteers are not infringed upon during the service process. Moreover, enhancing medical student volunteers' attention to laws and regulations and their legal awareness through education and publicity is also crucial to ensuring that they can effectively safeguard their own rights and interests in voluntary service.

4.2. Political system of medical students' voluntary service (goal-achieving function)

By strengthening system construction, integrating education with practice, the social recognition of medical students' voluntary service can be enhanced, and the healthy development of medical students' voluntary service can be promoted.

4.2.1. Strengthening system construction

Relevant systems for medical students' voluntary service should be established and improved, including registration, training, supervision and evaluation systems, to ensure the standardization and professionalization of voluntary service. At the same time, a tripartite feedback system for medical students' voluntary service should be established to conduct research and feedback on volunteers, demand units and service recipients, so as to promptly adjust existing problems and promote the healthy development of medical students' voluntary service.

4.2.2. Integrating education with practice

Guidance on the concept of voluntary service should be strengthened in medical education, and rich practical opportunities should be provided for medical students. This enables medical students to improve their professional skills and humanistic care ability in voluntary service practice, and realize social value while enhancing their own capabilities.

4.2.3. Improving social recognition of medical students' voluntary service

Through publicity and education, the recognition and support of units in need of voluntary service and service recipients for medical students' voluntary service should be improved. Prejudices against voluntary service should be broken, social recognition of voluntary service should be enhanced, and the social value of medical student volunteers should be elevated.

4.3. Social community system of medical students' voluntary service (integration function)

By innovating the forms of medical students' voluntary service, building cooperation platforms and establishing long-term mechanisms, social resources such as schools, hospitals, communities and factories can be integrated.

4.3.1. Innovating service forms

The traditional voluntary service model should be broken. Combined with the professional characteristics of medical students, diversified voluntary service activities should be carried out, such as health lectures, hospital guidance and community health screenings, so as to give full play to the professional advantages of medical students. At the same time, the limitations of region and time can be broken, and online and online-offline integrated voluntary service methods can be carried out.

4.3.2. Building cooperation platforms

To more effectively promote medical students' voluntary service and professional growth, a multi-participant cooperation platform should be established, connecting medical colleges and universities, surrounding communities, hospitals and other educational institutions. This platform will serve as a network communication and cooperation platform for voluntary service supply and demand information, enabling the matching and implementation of medical students' voluntary service activities in a diversified and efficient manner.

4.3.3. Establishing long-term mechanisms

Long-term mechanisms for medical students' voluntary service should be explored and established, including mechanisms for volunteer recruitment, training, policy incentives and social support. These mechanisms ensure the normalization and sustainable development of medical students' voluntary service, and provide high-quality and professional voluntary service activities for society.

4.4. Cultural system of medical students' voluntary service (latent pattern maintenance function)

By cultivating the sense of social responsibility of medical student volunteers, strengthening the voluntary service spirit and promoting the construction of voluntary service culture, the sustainability of medical students' voluntary service can be ensured.

4.4.1. Cultivating medical students' sense of social responsibility

Through voluntary service activities, medical students come into contact with society and patients, which promotes their professional learning and the improvement of professional skills. It also guides medical students to establish the awareness of "great physicians with sincere hearts", form an outlook on life and values of devoting themselves to the cause of national medicine, and enhance their sense of social responsibility.

4.4.2. Strengthening the voluntary service spirit

The voluntary service spirit of "dedication, friendship, mutual assistance and progress" should be vigorously promoted. Through voluntary service activities, medical student volunteers are encouraged to form positive values, and their sense of social responsibility and mission are enhanced while improving their practical ability.

4.4.3. Promoting the construction of voluntary service culture

A strong atmosphere of voluntary service on campus should be created through campus cultural activities and voluntary service projects. The publicity of medical students' voluntary service activities should be strengthened through campus new media to form positive public opinion guidance, and stimulate the enthusiasm and sense of pride of medical students to actively participate in voluntary service.

5. Conclusion

Medical students are future medical practitioners, and volunteer service is an effective way for them to engage with society and clinical practice. Based on the functional essence of social systems, this study analyzed quality improvement paths for medical students' volunteer service from four dimensions—economic, political, community, and cultural systems. It shifts the perspective from individual students to the broader social system, proposing multidimensional improvement strategies that provide useful exploration and attempts to enhance the level of medical students' volunteer service in China.

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