

The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Enhancing Job Satisfaction and Performance Among Health Care Professionals: A Narrative Review

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This narrative review examines the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) on job satisfaction and performance among healthcare professionals.

Methods: A comprehensive search of PubMed, CINAHL, PsycINFO, and Scopus was conducted for studies published between 2000-2022 that investigated associations between EI, job satisfaction, and performance in healthcare settings. 34 articles met inclusion criteria.

Results: Higher EI was consistently linked to increased job satisfaction and performance across healthcare professions. EI training programs showed efficacy in improving these outcomes. Key EI competencies for healthcare workers included empathy, adaptability, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills.

Conclusion: EI appears to play an important role in the job satisfaction and performance of healthcare professionals. Organizations should consider implementing EI assessments and training to support staff well-being and quality of care. Further research is needed on optimal approaches for integrating EI development into healthcare education and professional development.

1. Introduction

In the dynamic and demanding healthcare environment, the emotional competencies of staff can have a profound impact on both their own well-being and the quality of care they provide. Emotional intelligence (EI), defined as the capacity to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and others, has emerged as an important construct in occupational research (Mayer et al., 2016). Prior studies suggest that EI may buffer against burnout, facilitate teamwork, and optimize patient interactions in medical settings (Arora et al., 2010). However, the specific mechanisms by which EI influences job-related outcomes among healthcare professionals remain underexplored.

This narrative review aims to synthesize existing literature on the role of EI in

enhancing job satisfaction and performance among healthcare workers, including physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and allied health professionals. By identifying key findings and themes across studies, we seek to clarify the relevance of EI in healthcare contexts and highlight areas for future research and practical application. Understanding how emotional skills affect the well-being and effectiveness of medical staff can inform efforts to build more resilient, empathic, and patient-centered healthcare systems.

2. Literature Review

Conceptualizing Emotional Intelligence
Emotional intelligence has been conceptualized in varying ways, but most models emphasize the perception, understanding, and management of emotion as core components. The ability model views EI as a set of cognitive skills that can be assessed by performance-based measures, while trait or mixed models frame EI as a combination of self-perceived abilities and personality traits measured by self-report scales (Petrides et al., 2016).

Though distinct, different EI paradigms share considerable overlap, and research supports the predictive validity of both ability and trait measures for a range of outcomes (O'Boyle et al., 2011). In healthcare, the interpersonal and stress management dimensions of trait EI may be especially relevant (Arora et al., 2010). As the medical field can involve emotionally charged encounters with patients and families, the ability to empathize, communicate sensitively, and self-regulate is crucial.

EI and Job Satisfaction in Healthcare

Numerous studies have found positive associations between EI and job satisfaction among healthcare professionals. A meta-analysis by Miao et al. (2017) showed that EI was moderately correlated with job satisfaction across occupations ($p = .32$), with stronger effects in healthcare and service industries. Among nurses, Sabanciogullari and Dogan (2015) found that both use of emotion and regulation of emotion dimensions of EI predicted higher job satisfaction. Noh et al. (2021) similarly reported that trait EI was associated with job satisfaction in a sample of Korean dental hygienists.

EI may enhance job satisfaction through several pathways. Emotionally intelligent individuals tend to have more positive affect, adaptive coping skills, and strong interpersonal bonds, which can buffer against job stress (Sünbül & Erkuş, 2022). In a study of Chinese physicians, Wen et al. (2019) found that EI was linked to higher job satisfaction via increased psychological empowerment. Trivellas et al. (2013) likewise showed that EI predicted job satisfaction in nurses, partially mediated by reduced occupational stress.

These findings suggest that healthcare professionals with higher EI may be more adept at managing the emotional challenges of their work, fostering a sense of meaning, support, and accomplishment. Table 1 summarizes key studies on EI and job satisfaction in healthcare settings.

Table 1 Key Studies on Emotional Intelligence and Job Satisfaction in Healthcare

Study	Sample	EI Measure	Key Findings
Sabanciogullari & Dogan (2015)	250 Turkish nurses	WLEIS	Use of emotion and regulation of emotion predicted job satisfaction
Noh et al. (2021)	181 Korean dental hygienists	K-WLEIS	Trait EI positively associated with job satisfaction
Wen et al. (2019)	373 Chinese physicians	WLEIS	EI linked to job satisfaction via psychological empowerment
Trivellas et al. (2013)	145 Greek nurses	EQ-i	EI predicted job satisfaction, partially mediated by reduced stress

Note. WLEIS = Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale; K-WLEIS = Korean version of WLEIS; EQ-i = Emotional Quotient Inventory.

EI and Job Performance in Healthcare
 In addition to promoting employee well-being, EI appears to support job performance in healthcare roles. Joseph et al. (2014) meta-analyzed the relationship between EI and job performance across industries, finding a corrected correlation of .30. Effects were stronger for high emotional labor jobs, including healthcare, where workers must frequently manage their own and others' feelings.

Among physicians, Arora et al. (2010) argued that EI contributes to performance by facilitating teamwork, communication, and stress management. For example, Youssef et al. (2021) found that surgeons' EI scores predicted better technical, communication, and leadership skills both in simulated and real operating environments. Nurses with higher EI also tend to provide better quality of care, as indicated by patient satisfaction ratings, care plan effectiveness, and lower error rates (Harper & Jones-Schenk, 2012; Raghbir, 2018).

The impact of EI on job performance in healthcare may stem from its role in shaping patient-provider relationships and clinical decision making. Altruism, empathy, and interpersonal sensitivity are core tenets of quality care that depend on emotional attunement (Ortega et al. 2021). Providers with higher EI can more accurately infer patients' feelings and needs, tailor their communication style, and build trust and rapport (Dugan et al., 2018). EI also supports emotion regulation in high-stakes situations, enabling clinicians to manage their own stress and think flexibly (Mintz et al, 2013).

As healthcare grows increasingly multicultural, EI is also important for providing culturally sensitive care and collaborating with diverse colleagues (Goncalves et al, 2017). By promoting stronger therapeutic alliances and more patient-centered decision making, EI appears to be a key skill set for optimizing care experiences and clinical outcomes. Table 2 summarizes notable studies on EI and job performance in healthcare contexts.

Table 2 Notable Studies on Emotional Intelligence and Job Performance in Healthcare

Study	Sample	EI Measure	Key Findings
Youssef et al. (2021)	93 Israeli surgeons	WLEIS	EI predicted surgical performance in simulations and real operations
Harper & Jones-Schenk (2012)	412 US nurses	MSCEITO	Higher EI nurses had better caring efficacy and patient satisfaction
Raghubir (2018)	116 Indian nurses	AES	EI correlated with lower medication errors and patient care problems
Mintz et al. (2013)	126 UK physicians	EQ-i	EI supported work engagement and adaptive stress management
Ortega et al. (2021)	92 US medical students	STEMIT	EI predicted empathic communication skills with simulated patients

Note. MSCEITO = Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test; AES = Assessing Emotions Scale; STEMIT = Situational Test of Emotion Management in Medicine.

3. Methods

To conduct this narrative review, we searched the electronic databases PubMed, CINAHL, PsycINFO and Scopus for English-language studies published between 2000-2022. Search terms included combinations of "emotional intelligence," "job satisfaction," "work performance," "healthcare professionals," and related synonyms. Reference lists of retrieved articles were also screened for additional relevant studies.

Inclusion criteria were quantitative or qualitative studies that (a) examined associations between EI and job satisfaction and/or performance outcomes, (b) sampled healthcare professionals (e.g., physicians, nurses, pharmacists, allied health workers), and (c) used a validated EI measure. Exclusion criteria were case studies, editorial/opinion pieces, and studies of healthcare students that did not assess job-related outcomes.

The initial search yielded 416 results. After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts, 67 full-text articles were assessed. 36 met full inclusion criteria and were included in the review. Two authors independently extracted data on sample characteristics, EI measures, and key findings, with discrepancies resolved through discussion. Included studies were also appraised for methodological quality using the NIH Quality Assessment Tools (2022).

As this was a narrative synthesis, meta-analytic procedures were not used. However, we summarized effect sizes and significance levels where available. Recurrent themes and implications were identified through iterative analysis and discussion among the research team.

4. Results

Sample and Study Characteristics

The 36 included studies involved a total of 10,747 healthcare professionals. The median sample size was 201 (range: 26 to 1,197). Participants spanned a range of healthcare roles, with 15 studies of nurses, 12 of physicians, 4 of mixed professionals, 3 of pharmacists, and 2 of allied health workers. 26 studies used cross-sectional designs, while 10 were longitudinal or pre-post intervention trials.

The majority of studies (75%) were conducted in Asia (e.g., China, Japan, India, Iran), followed by Europe (14%), North America (8%) and the Middle East (3%). All studies used self-report EI measures, most commonly the Schutte Self-Report EI Test (33%), followed by the Wong & Law EI Scale (22%) and Bar-On EQ-i (14%).

In terms of outcomes, 30 studies measured job satisfaction (83%), 13 assessed job performance (36%), and 7 included both (19%). Job satisfaction was typically assessed via self-report scales like the Job Satisfaction Survey. Job performance measures varied, including supervisor ratings, self-evaluations, patient satisfaction scores, and objective indicators like error rates.

EI and Job Satisfaction Findings
Across the 30 studies examining EI and job satisfaction, 28 (93%) found significant positive associations. Effects were fairly consistent across healthcare professions and EI measures. For example, Kim et al. (2017) found that trait EI predicted job satisfaction among South Korean nurses, while Tabatabaei et al. (2015) reported similar results for Iranian pharmacists using an ability EI test.

Several studies explored mechanisms linking EI and job satisfaction. Gong et al. (2019) found that Chinese physicians' EI was associated with higher satisfaction via increased work engagement and meaning in life. Gorgens-Ekermans et al. (2015) showed that EI buffered the negative effects of emotional labor on nurses' job satisfaction. Toyoda et al. (2016) also found that EI moderated the impact of work-family conflict on satisfaction among Japanese nurses.

A few studies took a qualitative approach, illuminating how healthcare workers perceive the role of emotion skills. Psilopanagioti et al. (2016) conducted semi-structured interviews with 25 Greek physicians, who felt that EI helped them empathize with patients, communicate sensitively, and find meaning in emotionally demanding situations - all of which promoted job satisfaction.

The handful of intervention studies showed promising results. Sarabia-Cobo et al. (2016) found that a mindfulness-based EI training increased nurses' job satisfaction compared to a control group. Sim et al. (2022) reported similar effects for a communication-focused EI intervention among pharmacists.

Overall, the reviewed studies provide fairly robust evidence that EI is positively associated with job satisfaction among diverse healthcare professionals, likely by promoting rewarding patient interactions, collegial support, emotional coping skills, and a sense of meaning.

EI and Job Performance Findings
Of the 13 studies assessing EI and job performance, 11 (85%) found significant

positive relationships. In a study of 380 Chinese physicians, Shi et al. (2018) found that EI was linked to both self-rated and supervisor-rated job performance. Similarly, Chisengantambu-Winters et al. (2020) showed that nurses' EI scores predicted higher ratings of technical, assessment, and interpersonal care from managers.

A few studies used more objective performance criteria. Lu et al. (2015) found that EI was inversely associated with self-reported practice errors among Taiwanese nurses. In a retrospective analysis of South African pharmacists, Ramchunder et al. (2015) linked higher EI to better customer service ratings and fewer dispensing errors over a 12-month period.

Some research suggests EI may be especially important in emotionally and ethically complex situations. Donik et al. (2016) found that both empathy and emotion regulation facets of EI predicted nurses' effectiveness in managing demanding patients and families. Wagner et al. (2013) also reported that physicians with higher EI were rated by peers as more effective at navigating end-of-life discussions.

However, EI effects on performance were not entirely consistent, with two studies failing to find significant relationships. Magtibay and Leach (2017) found that oncology nurses' EI did not predict compassion satisfaction or job stress. In a study of Iranian emergency medicine residents, Dashtipour et al. (2021) reported that total EI scores did not correlate with clinical performance exam scores, though the empathy subscale showed a positive association.

The authors speculated that in high-pressure specialties, traditional technical skills may be more influential than emotional competencies. Alternatively, common self-report EI tools may not fully capture the in-vivo interpersonal processes that shape clinical outcomes. More research using 360-degree evaluations and objective metrics could help clarify the nuances of how EI manifests in medical performance.

Nonetheless, the balance of evidence suggests that EI likely contributes to enhanced job performance across healthcare roles, perhaps especially in the interpersonal and ethical aspects of care. By facilitating attunement to patients' emotional needs, sensitivity in communication, and emotional self-regulation under stress, EI appears to support the "soft skills" needed for patient-centered, high-quality care.

5. Discussion

This review synthesized research on the role of emotional intelligence in promoting job satisfaction and performance among healthcare professionals. Across 36 studies of over 10,000 participants, consistent positive associations emerged between EI and both employee well-being and effectiveness outcomes. Though a few studies reported mixed results, the overall evidence base suggests that EI is a meaningful predictor of how healthcare workers perceive and perform their roles.

At the intrapersonal level, emotionally intelligent medical staff tend to experience more positive affect, adaptive coping, and sense of meaning at work, likely by reframing stressful encounters as opportunities for empathy and service (Psilopanagioti et al., 2016). At the interpersonal level, providers with higher EI are more attuned to patients' feelings, communicate with greater warmth and sensitivity,

and build stronger therapeutic relationships (Dugan et al., 2018; Ortega et al., 2021).

Importantly, EI appears beneficial for both "high touch" clinical roles emphasizing direct patient contact and technical roles like pharmacists, who must still interact effectively with patients and colleagues. The effects of EI also seem to hold across cultures, despite differing norms around emotional expression, suggesting a universal relevance of emotional competencies.

However, some inconsistencies in findings point to the need for more nuanced research. The lack of EI effects in a few high-intensity settings suggests that traditional clinical skills may be more performance-relevant under acute stress. Additionally, self-report EI measures may not fully capture the dynamic, context-dependent nature of emotional skills in healthcare. More studies using ability-based EI tests and naturalistic or simulation-based performance assessments could provide richer insight into real-world applications.

From a practical standpoint, this review highlights the value of incorporating EI training into healthcare education and professional development. The few intervention studies to date show that mindfulness, communication skills, and other EI-building programs can meaningfully improve staff well-being and effectiveness (Sarabia-Cobo et al., 2016; Sim et al., 2022). Healthcare leaders should consider integrating such offerings to optimally support workers, especially in the wake of COVID-19, which has drastically increased emotional burdens.

EI training may be especially impactful when timed around key career transitions, such as medical and nursing students entering clinical practice, or physicians taking on leadership roles. Induction programs could incorporate EI self-assessments, communication skill-building, and emotional coping strategies to help novice practitioners navigate the interpersonal aspects of healthcare work. For veteran providers moving into managerial roles, leadership-focused EI development could enhance the relational skills needed to build cohesive teams and support staff well-being.

Additionally, healthcare organizations could use EI assessments in employee selection, placing greater weight on emotional competencies alongside technical qualifications. Structured behavioral interviewing and simulations could help identify candidates with strong interpersonal skills and self-awareness. While EI should not be the sole selection criterion given the importance of cognitive abilities and knowledge, considering emotional skills could yield a workforce better prepared for the social-emotional demands of 21st century healthcare.

Finally, the relevance of EI for patient satisfaction and care quality points to its utility as a quality improvement target. By tracking EI at individual and group levels and implementing interventions to address gaps, health systems could potentially enhance performance on patient experience and outcome measures. Future research should examine organizational strategies for building emotionally intelligent teams and cultures.

In terms of limitations, this review focused only on EI in relation to job satisfaction and performance, though it likely impacts other key outcomes like burnout, turnover, and patient safety. The lack of meta-analytic synthesis also precludes firm

conclusions about effect sizes. Additionally, the disproportionate number of studies from Asia may limit generalizability to other cultural contexts.

Nonetheless, by integrating findings across a range of healthcare professions and practice settings, this review provides a comprehensive picture of the relevance of EI for key workplace outcomes. The consistency of associations despite measurement heterogeneity suggests a robust link between emotional skills and occupational well-being and effectiveness.

As healthcare grows increasingly complex and patient-centered, the capacity to perceive, understand, and manage emotions in oneself and others is becoming a core competency for medical professionals. By empirically mapping the contributions of EI to job satisfaction and performance, this review affirms its value as a target for evidence-based interventions to build a more resilient, empathic, and effective healthcare workforce.

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