

Contract vs permanent: an academic perspective on the current stand-off in health care sector between nurses and the government

Under the dispensation of the new constitution health care became a devolved function making it fall under the stewardship of the County governments. Since then the health care sector has faced a number of challenges. As far as the healthcare workforce is concerned, the period since the transition from the national government to the county government has been a turbulent one to say the least. The country has witnessed a number of strikes by health practitioners over the country. Earlier this year, in a move perhaps meant to quell the frequent strikes in the health care sector in the recent past, the government announced its plans to employ nurses on contract basis, a shift from the current permanent terms of employment. According to the government's official statement, all vacancies for recruitment of nurses arising from natural attrition would be filled on contract terms. Nurses countrywide, through their union (the Kenya National Union of Nurses) have opposed the government's plans. In fact, they have even threatened to go on strike if the government goes ahead to implement its proposed plans. The Central Organization of Trade Unions (COTU) has echoed the nurses' sentiment and added its voice in opposing the proposal. On the other side the government remains adamant and argues that its plans are aimed at improving service delivery. This paper looks at both sides of the coin by looking at the advantages and disadvantages of both contract and permanent terms of employment. This paper will also look at the probable consequences if the government goes ahead and implements its plans.