

TITLE: An Investigation of the Leadership Practice of Encouragement and Its Correlation with Career Commitment and Career Withdrawal Cognition in Air Force Medical Service

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OBJECTIVE: The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership practice of encouragement by Air Force Medical Squad Commanders (MSC) toward Company Grade Officers (CGO) and subsequent correlations with career commitment and withdrawal cognitions within the Air Force Medical Service.

METHODOLOGY: A random sample of 186 MSCs were asked to participate, with 59 usable responses received (32%). They completed the Encouraging the Heart (ETH) scale of the LPI and sent to their CGOs the Observer form of the ETH, the Career Commitment Questionnaire (Blau, 1988) and the Career Withdrawal Cognition Scale (Blau, 1989). A total of 113 usable surveys were received. The average age of MSCs was 44 years, average command time was 15 months, most were males (73%) at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (75%). The average age of CGOs was 32 years; average time commissioned was 4 years, slightly more females (52%) at the rank of Captain (78%).

KEY FINDINGS: MSC scores on the ETH scale were significantly higher than those of their constituents (CGO). The relationship between the CGO assessments of their leader's ETH and career commitment was not confirmed ($p > .05$), although it was for career withdrawal cognitions ($p < .05$). The former correlation was negative (unexpected), while the latter was negative (as hypothesized).

“Encouragement is one (leadership practice) that MSCs perceived as a practice worthy of ordinary use” (p. 58), reports the author, but “disconnects found between the perception of giving and receiving encouragement is of profound importance; it is a direct result of observed behaviors by CGOs of MSC and the leaders' responsibility to reconcile them” (p. 59). The author concludes, “Practically speaking, this result indicates that insofar as CGOs perceive or feel encouraged, they are less likely to think about withdrawing from their military healthcare careers” (p. 63).