Eyes Wide Open; A closer look into why trainees leave Ophthalmology training

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BACKGROUND

Rates of attrition in the medical profession have increased in recent years. The General Medical Council reported the overall proportion of those leaving the profession was 3.9% in 2017 compared to 3.4% in 2012. Burnout is the fastest rising reason for taking a break amongst foundation year two doctors (1). Despite being a competitive postgraduate specialty, with 5.26 ST1 applications per post in 2017 (2), there are still trainees who leave the training programme. As representatives of trainees across the UK, the Ophthalmologists in Training Group is keen to better understand why junior doctors are leaving ophthalmology training, with the aim of providing better support for them.

METHODS

- 35 trainees left Ophthalmology Specialist Training (OST) between November 2012 and November 2018.
- They were emailed an online, anonymous questionnaire exploring the reasons they left and support they received.
- The questionnaire covered; demographics, factors contributing to leaving OST and support offered to trainees when making this decision.
- Former trainees were asked to rank factors using a numeric Likert scale, from 1: 'having no influence on my decision to leave' to 5: 'heavily influencing my decision to leave'

RESULTS

- 66.6% response rate (20 responses). 55% female, 45% male. 85% working full-time,15% LTFT
- 55% responded that location and rotation of placements 'heavily' or 'moderately' influenced their decision to leave.
- Of ST1 and ST2 respondents 55.5% reported that unsupportive working environments 'heavily' or 'moderately' influenced their decision.
- Among trainees ST3 or above, the most common factors contributing to their decision to leave was the location and rotation of placements.

What factors led to you leaving ophthalmology training?

'A high workload and poorly staffed rota along with a disinterest to acknowledge why I had taken time off work with stress'

'Frequently pulled into overbooked clinics/casualty sessions'

'Lack of supervision in Eye Casualty/on calls was often an issue'

'I didn't have consistent clinical mentors who were willing to take me under their wing'

'I felt unsupported in a specialty I had little practical experience in'

- Recurrent themes in feedback; training is currently too rigid, distant geographic locations with frequent rotation of placements, training by stage rather than competency and a lack of support for time out of training.
- 14/17 did seek or were offered support prior to leaving training.
- Source of support; Clinical and Educational Supervisors, Training Programme Directors, Postgraduate Deans, professional counselling and deanery professional support units.
- 11/14 felt this support was useful but there were comments emphasising the difficulty in being open and honest in these discussions.



CONCLUSIONS

With approximately 650 trainees in OST, an average of 85 trainees joining the training programme every year and a reported 35 trainees leaving over a five to six-year period there is an **attrition rate of 5.4%**. This questionnaire provides invaluable insight into trainees who have left OST. The factors influencing trainees to leave the training programme are complex but this information identifies areas that can be addressed; consistent clinical and surgical supervision for junior trainees and highlights common themes that, if recognised, may lead to retaining trainees.

REFERENCES

1. General Medical Council. Training pathways; analysis of the transition from the foundation programme to the next stage of training. November 2017
2. Health Education England. Competition Ratios 2018. Updated 2019, cited 2019 June 15. Available from https://specialtytraining.hee.nhs.uk/Competition-Ratios