

How Western Australian registrars choose training practices

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BACKGROUND

While general practice registrars receive advice on how to choose a training practice, little is known about what underlies their decision.

METHOD

A questionnaire was sent to all registrars in Western Australian General Practice Education and Training practices seeking information about the choice of their practice.

RESULTS

Most registrars reported that they had chosen their practice. The supervisor was most commonly the person spoken to before the practice was chosen.

DISCUSSION

The supervisor's personality was an important influence on choice and the practice manager was an important contact for registrars who were parents, presumably to arrange a part time attachment. Those who reported speaking to the supervisor also reported that they subsequently received greater remuneration. Registrars from a rural background chose more often to have all their training in a rural area.

When general practice registrars consider choosing a training practice they are often advised to speak to the practice supervisor, manager and staff, as well as the current or previous registrar. Other advice has included a guided tour of the practice, looking at the practice leaflet, checking that they will have a regular consulting room, discovering the on call arrangements, asking if the pay is above or according to the Australian National Minimum Terms and Conditions, and checking that there is a practice nurse.^{1,2} Further advice is to ask the Regional Training Provider for details of feedback from previous registrars about the practice.³

In May each year the Regional Training Provider for Western Australia (WAGPET) sends registrars an outline of practices available for the following year. Registrars are asked to list three preferred training posts. A meeting is then held with the Regional Training Provider and supervisor and registrar representatives with the intent to satisfy as many first and second preferences as possible across the two 6 month terms of each year.⁴

Despite this process, little is known about how

registrars actually arrive at their decision. Urban location, the registrar's relationships and a perceived lack of amenities in rural areas are possible influences.⁵⁻⁷

Method

A questionnaire was administered to all basic, advanced and subsequent Western Australian registrars in their practices in the first 6 months of 2006. Responses were returned to the state Regional Training Provider and analysed using SPSS statistical software.⁸

Results

Out of 61 registrars who were sent the questionnaire, 60 responded (98% response rate). Thirty-eight (63%) were women; 17 (28%) were aged 20-29 years, 30 (50%) were aged 30-39 years, 13 (21%) were aged over 40 years; and 44 (73%) were Australian medical graduates.

Fifty-three of the 60 registrar respondents (88%) replied positively to the question: 'Did you choose the training practice for semester 1, 2006?' Thirty-two of these respondents (53%) were in rural general practice and 28 (47%) were in urban/outer metropolitan practice.

Practice issues

Of the 53 registrars who reported choosing their practice, 37 (70%) stated that they spoke to the practice supervisor before doing so. Thirty-four (89%) reported that this influenced their choice of practice; 24 (65%) reported that subsequently they had received more remuneration than that required by the National Minimum Terms and Conditions compared with only two of the 16 (13%) who had not spoken to their supervisor ($\chi^2 10.2$ df 1 $p=0.001$). Seven registrars reported speaking to a patient of the practice and all of these registrars stated that this favourably influenced their choice (Table 1).

Partner/family considerations

Considering the 53 registrars who reported choosing their practice, 44 (83%) said they were in a long term relationship, with 26 (59%) stating their partner's occupation was very or extremely important in the practice choice. Twenty-four (45%) indicated they were parents. Parents were more likely to be aged over 29 years (22, 92%) compared with nonparents (17, 58%, $\chi^2 7.3$ df 1 $p=0.007$). Parents were also more likely to be working part time in their chosen practice (11, 46%) compared with nonparents (3, 10%, $\chi^2 8.5$ df 1 $p=0.004$). Parents were more likely to have spoken to the practice manager of their chosen practice (18, 75%) compared to nonparents (12, 41%, $\chi^2 4.7$ df 1 $p=0.02$). School proximity was reported as being important for 12 parents (50%) and child care proximity for 7 parents (29%).

Rural considerations

Of the 44 registrars who graduated from an Australian medical school (and thus were not under government restriction to train solely in rural areas), 24 (56%) were currently in a rural teaching practice. These included all rural pathway registrars (13) who, at the beginning of their training, had decided to do all their training in a rural environment. The remaining 11 were general pathway registrars doing their compulsory rural term. One registrar in each of these two groups reported having no choice in selecting a practice.

Nine (69%) of the 13 rural pathway registrars reported that they had grown up or lived a significant part of their lives in a small town or rural area compared with six (19%) of all 31 general pathway registrars (Fishers Exact 2 sided $p=0.004$).

Table 1. Chosen practice (n=53)

	Registrar spoke to	Registrar influenced by
Practice supervisor	37 (70%)	34 (64%)
Practice manager	29 (55%)	18 (34%)
Previous registrar	18 (34%)	14 (26%)
Practice receptionist	9 (17%)	4 (7%)
Practice patient	7 (13%)	7 (13%)
Practice nurse	5 (9%)	3 (6%)

Discussion

These findings are limited by the subjectiveness of the data and the fact that the registrars were choosing from a limited range of options. Also, the matching process applies to only one Regional Training Provider and may not necessarily be the same as those used by the other 20 similar organisations in Australia.

The reported impact of the supervisor's perceived personality on the registrar resonates with other studies where teacher enthusiasm, supervisor adaptability to the registrar's personality and the alignment of both parties' values have been shown to be important.^{9,11,12} More research on the effects of general practice supervisors' personalities is needed.

For parents, the practice manager seemed to be an important contact before choosing. This may reflect their need to organise part time sessions. Most registrars did not meet the practice nurse before choosing a practice. When spoken to, the people considered most influential were the practice's patients, the supervisor, and the previous registrar. However, it was rarely reported that a practice patient was spoken to. Speaking to the supervisor might be economically advantageous to the registrar.

Rural pathway registrars who had graduated from an Australian medical school showed the internationally well known tendency of coming from a rural background,¹³ suggesting that they are continuing their path to becoming rural general practitioners.¹⁴

Implications for general practice

- Registrars are given advice on how to choose a training practice.
- Some registrars talk to the practice supervisor.
- Most registrars in this study reported that

they chose the practice.

- Most felt that the supervisor's personality was important to their choice.
- When rarely a patient was spoken to this markedly influenced the registrar.

Conflict of interest: at the time of the study the author was a medical educator with WAGPET.

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