

Qualities of a good training practice

Perceptions of advanced general practice registrars

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BACKGROUND

General practice registrars report satisfaction with their placements in Australian training practices. However, more needs to be known about which criteria comprise this global satisfaction.

METHODS

A questionnaire was sent to 61 general practice registrars in Western Australia who had recently completed a 6 month advanced term in a training practice, seeking feedback on the practice. They were asked to mark the training practice on a scale of one (lowest) to 10 (highest) according to how well the training practice met a range of criteria.

RESULTS

General practice registrars who rated their training practice highly believed the required amount of effective teaching and supervision had been provided to them during the placement, and adequate time made available for consultations, case reviews, discussion, and tuition.

DISCUSSION

General practice registrars rating their training practice highly were more likely to have been allowed time to undertake outside education activities. Registrars not rating their training practices highly may be compromised by clinical service commitments. Registrars who believed members of the practice staff (medical and nonmedical) other than the general practice trainer had contributed to their learning were more likely to rate their training practice highly.

As part of vocational general practice training in Australia, general practice registrars are required to undergo basic, advanced and subsequent training in teaching practices in a program approved by The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) to achieve Fellowship of the RACGP (FRACGP).¹ In the advanced term (6 months), the registrar builds on experience, knowledge and skills developed during the basic term. In the subsequent term, the registrar (in most cases) prepares and sits for FRACGP.²

General practice registrars report satisfaction with their placements in Australian training practices.³ However, more needs to be known about which criteria comprise this satisfaction. This study assessed advanced general practice registrars' perceptions of their training practices,

and how these varied according to presence or absence of particular features in a training practice.

Method

During 2003–2004 a questionnaire was sent to 61 general practice registrars in Western Australia who had recently completed an advanced term, seeking feedback on their 6 month placement in a training practice. Responses were returned to the state regional training provider, and divided into two groups: those where the registrar gave the training practice a high (≥ 9 out of 10) overall mark; and low (≤ 8 out of 10). Questionnaire responses were analysed using SPSS statistical software.⁴

Results

Fifty-nine general practice registrars responded (97%

response rate). Thirty-one (52%) were women; 25 (42%) were aged 20–29 years; 29 (49%) 30–39 years; four (7%) 40–49 years; and one (2%) was aged over 49 years. Most (54, 90%) graduated from an Australian university. A high overall mark was given by 31 (52%) registrars, while 28 (48%) gave their practice a low overall mark.

General practice registrars who rated their training practice highly believed the required amount of effective teaching and supervision had been provided, and adequate time made available for consultations, case reviews, discussion, and tuition (Table 1).

Discussion

This study is limited by being subjective, and by the group being small and confined to one state. However, supervisor availability has also been rated as a desirable feature of a training practice by general practice registrars in other studies.^{5–9}

General practice registrars rating their training practice highly were more likely to have been allowed time by their practice to undertake outside education activities. Registrars not rating their training practices highly may be compromised by clinical service commitments.¹⁰

Advanced general practice registrars may be contemplating future employment. If the registrar was satisfied with the terms and conditions negotiated with a training practice, the practice was likely to be rated highly.

The physical consulting environment (ie. whether the registrar had their own consulting room) did not influence ratings. It is a given expectation that a training practice's rooms and facilities will be adequate.¹¹ However, registrars in this study rated the practice highly if access to email and the internet was provided.

Members of the practice staff (medical and nonmedical) other than the general practice trainer contributing to the registrar's learning was associated with a high rating. This raises questions about the value general practice registrars place on the role of the practice nurse in teaching and how nonmedical staff can provide feedback (eg. billing and time management).

Future studies should address:

- characteristics of general practice supervisors whose practices receive repeated low overall marks from registrars
- barriers to registrars undertaking education activities external to their training practice
- the value of medical and nonmedical practice teaching by staff other than the general practice trainer

- the role of the internet as an information source in general practice training, and
- the impact of a practice's high overall mark on a registrar's final choice of practice.

Implications for general practice

What we already knew:

- Registrars report satisfaction with their placements in Australian training practices.

What this study found:

- Registrars who rate a training practice highly were more likely to:
 - regard quality of teaching as an important feature of a training practice
 - have been given time for external formal education
 - have email and internet access in the consulting room
 - have been satisfied with the terms and conditions negotiated for their placement at the practice.

Conflict of interest: Robert Moorhead is a medical educator with regional training provider Western Australia General Practice Education and Training (WAGPET). This study is based on feedback provided by general practice registrars who undertook placements at WAGPET training practices.

Table 1. Advanced general practice registrars' perceptions of their training practice

| | Respondents giving practice an overall score of: | | |
|---|--|------------------|----------|
| | ≥9 (high) n=31 | ≤8 (low) n=28 | p |
| I was given adequate time to attend formal educational activities outside the practice | 31 (100%) | 22 (79%) | <0.01* |
| I was satisfied with the terms and conditions negotiated with the practice | 31 (100%) | 24 (86%) | <0.05* |
| The consulting rooms, facilities and equipment provided were adequate | 30 (97%) | 25 (89%) | NS |
| I received the required amount of teaching and supervision for this placement | 30 (97%) | 17 (61%) | <0.01* |
| I found the teaching I received from my general practice supervisor effective | 30 (97%) | 21 (75%) | <0.05* |
| Other members of the practice staff (medical and nonmedical) contributed significantly to my learning | 30 (97%) | 19 (66%) | <0.01* |
| I achieved my learning plans during this attachment | 28 (90%) | 26 (93%) | NS |
| The general practice supervisor made regular and adequate time available for consultations, case reviews, discussion, and tuition | 28 (90%) | 18 (64%) | <0.05** |
| Computerised prescribing was available to me | 26 (84%) | 26 (93%) | NS |
| I had access to my own consulting room | 22 (71%) | 20 (71%) | NS |
| I had access to both email and the internet in the consulting room | 18 (58%) | 8 (29%) | <0.05*** |

* Fishers Exact test 2 sided, ** Chi-square 5.8 df 1, $p=0.036$, *** 5.19 df 1 $p=0.044$

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