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## Respiratory specialty specific examinations in the south west

Editor – We read with interest the clinical and scientific letter from Medford and Jeyabalan regarding south west higher specialist trainee perceptions of the respiratory specialty certificate examination (SCE) (*Clin Med* December 2012 pp 609). They propose a survey to evaluate the perceptions of trainees nationwide.

The British Thoracic Society (BTS) Specialist Trainees Advisory Group (STAG) recently undertook just such a survey, using an anonymised electronic questionnaire sent to all BTS trainee members. The total number of responders was 95, 56 (59%) of whom had undertaken the SCE. Perceptions were measured by the Likert rating scale with an option for free text.

Overall, trainees felt the SCE was appropriate in difficulty, content and duration, and felt the SCE correlated to the JRCPTB curriculum for respiratory medicine. Concern was raised regarding the proportion of questions related to obscure and rare conditions. Furthermore, ambiguity and similarity of some questions within individual examinations was reported. While the radiological content of the SCE

was deemed appropriate in volume and difficulty, concerns were raised regarding image viewing facilities within the examination test centres.

The examination test centres, used for all SCEs, were felt to be acceptable for their purpose, but trainees reported frequent interruptions by candidates sitting concurrent, often shorter, examinations (driving theory tests being the most commonly cited).

Trainees felt there was inadequate guidance regarding when to sit the SCE and reported receiving contradictory advice from regional training programme directors, ARCP panels and the RCP. Trainees deemed ST5 to be the most appropriate stage to take the SCE. The RCP was felt to provide adequate information regarding the SCE content and structure, but trainees felt additional revision guidance and practice questions would be desirable. The cost of the SCE was widely criticised for being too high.

The survey confirmed the popularity of the BTS SCE preparation course and highlighted a role for the BTS STAG in connecting trainees through a central online revision network. Trainees perceived a role for the BTS in guiding SCE content and structure, lobbying to ensure examination centres are of a high standard universally and lobbying to have the cost of the SCE reduced. To this end, the survey results have been communicated to the Respiratory Medicine Specialist Advisory Committee (SAC) for their review and action. The SAC has links to the RCP and JRCPTB and is well placed to respond to trainee feedback.

In summary, this nationwide survey mirrors the perceptions of regional trainees identified by Medford and Jeyabalan, but provides additional information regarding perceptions of the SCE structure and content, the examination test centre network and the roles of the RCP and BTS. Through feedback to those involved in the design and implementation of the SCE, trainees' suggestions and concerns are being raised at the highest level.

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