

The impact of burnout and short staffing levels on trainee satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic in a tertiary care hospital

Author: Khin Kay Kay Kyaw^A

Introduction

It is well recognised that trainee burnout and short staffing levels in medical training have become a global crisis in recent years.^{1,2} A lack of effective strategies that are indicated by the NHS has led to significant trainee dissatisfaction and emotional distress, due to lack of trainee support and educational opportunities.^{3,4}

Materials and methods

This study aimed to assess the impact of burnout and short staffing on trainee satisfaction during the COVID-19 crisis. The further objectives were to understand the reasons for poor satisfaction among medicine trainees and to formulate the local guidelines to standardise the trainee competency commitment. A total of 35 medical trainee doctors were enrolled into medical specialty rotations from 4 August 2021 to 31 January 2022. Of this group, 30 have worked as full-time trainees whose work involved responsibility for covering the acute medical take as per rotation. The survey questionnaires were created based on the trainee's perception of their level of satisfaction in working commitment and opportunities for learning.³ The level of satisfaction was assessed in three main areas, including out-of-hours working time, procedural competencies and trainee-based official teaching hours per rotation.

Results and discussion

It was found that only eight out of 30 trainees (26%) met their level of satisfaction while 24 (80%) out of 30 trainees revealed poor satisfaction throughout their training periods.

In 18 (75%) out of 24 trainees who reported poor satisfaction, the main reasons were extreme short staffing levels within out-of-hours working time and burnout following the extreme workload and stress levels during the pandemic. The remaining trainee doctors (25%) reflected upon the lack of educational opportunities to achieve their level of competencies in procedural skills and protected teaching hours for self-directed learning during the pandemic.

Conclusion

The input of the trainee's perspective is highly valued in postgraduate medical education, which helps understand the main reasons for poor satisfaction of doctors within their working time.^{3,4} This study highlights the long-term impact of burnout and stress levels on trainee competencies and satisfaction, and highly recommends the early implementation of effective measures to combat the ongoing short-staffing issue following the COVID-19 crisis. ■

References

- 1 West CP, Halvorsen AJ, Swenson SL *et al*. Burnout and distress among internal medicine program directors: results of a national survey. *J Gen Intern Med* 2013;28:1056–63.
- 2 Landrigan CP, Rothschild JM, Cronin JW *et al*. Effect of reducing interns' work hours on serious medical errors in intensive care units. *New Engl J Med* 2004;351:1838–48.
- 3 West CP, Dyrbye LN, Shanafelt TD. Physician burnout: contributors, consequences and solutions. *J Int Med* 2018;283:516–29.
- 4 Shanafelt TD, Dyrbye LN, West CP. Addressing physician burnout: the way forward. *JAMA* 2017;317:901–2.

Author: ^ACraigavon Area Hospital, Portadown, UK