

Are foundation taster weeks an underutilised resource?

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Introduction

The UK Foundation Programme recommends that up to 10 days can be used during foundation year 1 (FY1) and foundation year 2 (FY2) to undertake taster placements in specialties to gain further experience and explore career options before considering specialty applications.¹ This is an especially good opportunity if trainees wish to trial a specialty not represented during their foundation placements. The Northern Foundation School was not aware of the number of placements undertaken in local education providers over the past 5 years. We asked, was this opportunity being underutilised?

Materials and methods

A retrospective review was undertaken by contacting foundation education leads and medical education teams at each local education provider. Information requested included the number of tasters undertaken and in which specialty the placement was completed. Focus groups were arranged with FY1 and FY2 doctors to explore barriers and motivations to accessing taster week experiences.

Results and discussion

Nine local education providers responded to the data request from the Northern Foundation School. In total, 676 foundation tasters were completed across 75 different specialties in the north east and north Cumbria. This represented 29.4% of FY1 and FY2 trainees over a 5-year period. Foundation trainee focus groups are underway to explore the main barriers and motivations to undertaking taster weeks, with data reporting in progress.

Conclusion

A large number of tasters were conducted, but this represents less than a third of foundation trainees in our region. In the era of COVID-19 training recovery, it is imperative we give our foundation trainees maximum access to beneficial training opportunities to develop their future career pathways. Upon completion of focus groups, innovative resources will be introduced, and further work undertaken to explore uptake in future years. ■

Reference

- 1 UK Foundation Programme curriculum, 2021. www.foundationprogramme.nhs.uk/curriculum [Accessed 10 March 2022].

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