
Collegiate Trainees Committee report on career guidance in psychiatric training

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To determine the availability of career guidance within psychiatric training, the Collegiate Trainees Committee surveyed 300 trainees who had recently sat the MRCPsych Part II examination and 136 (45%) responded. Most trainees had received little or no career guidance and some had sought career advice without success. One third of trainees felt they had encountered discrimination within their psychiatric training. We urge trainees to be pro-active in seeking career guidance, identify sources of advice and make suggestions for topics to be discussed within consultant supervision sessions. We recommend that local access to career advice should be assessed by visiting College inspection panels.

It is well recognised that some medical schools produce proportionally more career psychiatrists than other schools. Several studies have considered some of the factors which may contribute these differences – student selection, attitude of teachers, and model of psychiatry (Brook, 1976; 1983). Little has been reported, however, about the factors which determine choice of specialty within psychiatry once a doctor has entered psychiatric training, or about the role of career advice imparted to trainees. Career guidance is one of the issues that should be discussed in the trainee's weekly supervision session with his or her consultant, in the latter's role as educational supervisor. Wider arrangements, beyond local training schemes, were outlined by Johnson (1990) and relate to recommendations made by the Conference of Postgraduate Medical Deans of the United Kingdom. Despite these arrangements, and following discussion within the Collegiate Trainees Committee of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (CTC) and with audiences at the local trainees' days that it organises, it was apparent that trainees themselves were concerned about the availability of career guidance. Furthermore, CTC representatives have relayed concern about trainees in their local areas who have been 'stuck' at the registrar level and who have, or are contemplating leaving psychiatry altogether. The CTC wished to determine the amount of career advice that relatively experi-

enced psychiatric trainees had obtained, their career aspirations within psychiatry, and any particular difficulties they have encountered within their training.

To assess the size of this problem we surveyed a group of trainees who one would have expected to have received some career advice or guidance – those who had recently sat the MRCPsych Part II examination.

The study

Three hundred questionnaires were distributed to trainees with British addresses from the College examinations office along with their examination results. One hundred questionnaires were sent initially to those who passed the examination in December 1991 and 48 responded. To obtain a larger sample, a further 200 questionnaires were distributed to those who sat the examination in May 1992 (and passed or failed) and 88 replied. This gave a total of 136 (45%) responses. Replies were anonymous as we wished to obtain information on a strictly confidential basis. We initially asked only those who passed the examination as we thought it more likely that they would respond, but we then recognised the need for a larger sample size. Trainees were asked about formal career advice (presentations, courses, meetings with regional advisers) and informal advice (in supervision, with colleagues, discussion in corridor).

Findings

The mean age of the sample was 31 years (range 28–50 years) and 62 (46%) were female. They had qualified in medicine an average of 6.6 years previously and had trained in psychiatry an average of 4.3 years (range 3–10 years).

Career aspirations

Seventy-nine (51%) had firm intentions about working in one (or more) specialty within

