

Current Influences on Students' Career Choices at Warwick Medical School

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BACKGROUND

Choosing a career pathway is the most important decision facing medical students. Recent government reforms to postgraduate training mean junior doctors need to select their future specialty at an earlier stage. An understanding of the influences upon medical students' career choices is essential for improving educational experiences and work force planning.

AIM

To investigate current influences on medical student career ambitions with special regard to the influence of recent government reforms to postgraduate training and working hours.

METHOD

19 final year Warwick Medical Students were randomly recruited to 3 focus groups. There was a wide-range of preferred future specialties amongst the students in each group. 22 consultants from faculty teaching staff participated in 1:1 semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling aimed to include a maximal range of specialties. Recordings of the above were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis.

Experience

"You know when you just meet someone who inspires you and you think, I want to be like them." (Student)

"I look at certain specialties and I look at how happy those doctors are." (Student)

"If they feel that they've enjoyed a specialty, been well supported, well taught and they've understood by the end of it then they will potentially be more interested in taking it on." (Faculty)

Lifestyle

"Where it was very tricky in the past to be a consultant in a hospital and have a family people may have veered towards general practice where as now its easier, both are very feasible." (Student)

"I don't want medicine to become my life at all and even though I haven't decided on my career path I know it will influence me because I want to have a life outside of medicine." (Student)

"I'd fit my family around my job because I've not worked this hard to get through purgatory to then give it all up just to have children." (Student)

Self-Perception

"I would argue just being here [medical school] makes you clever enough to do it [neurosurgery] but maybe that's just a confidence thing." (Student)

"There are some things I just won't do now because I don't think I'm bright enough." (Student)

"I'm pretty sure that students that feel they are academically less able than others might choose specialties they perceive to be less academically challenging." (Faculty)

Others' Perception of Specialty

"I think the way medicine has progressed it's becoming less stereotyped" (Student)

"There are sexy specialties compared to others though aren't there?" (Student)

"I think most people respect radiologists because it's always like, I have no idea what this shows, lets ask the radiologist but then in a career choice it's one of the ones you don't ever think of." (Student)

RESULTS

Competition

"It depends on the person but I think you have to go for what you want to do and take that risk." (Student)

"It's not the competition itself, it's what's involved in getting ahead of the competition. It involves a lot of sacrifices...so it's whether or not you want it bad enough to sacrifice those things." (Student)

"I find competition is a good thing, if there's not someone to compete with me and push me I usually loose interest pretty quickly and so I thrive on competition." (Student)

CONCLUSION

- The enforcement of the EUWTD does not appear to have impacted on the work-life balance considerations of most students but has produced concerns about gaining adequate clinical exposure.
- Work/life balance is an important consideration in deciding on a career.
- The majority of students feel competitive specialties should not be avoided if it is a specialty they enjoy.
- A proportion of students base their career decisions on their perceived academic ability with regard to the perceived complexity of a specialty.
- Personal experience, whether interpersonal or of a specialty has a large influence on career aspirations.