The importance of Quality Management of doctors in training

Postgraduate medical education is changing as a result of the UK Government’s commitment to Modernising Medical Careers, new Working Time Regulations, and public pressure on healthcare providers to safeguard patient safety. It is important that doctors in training develop the necessary skills and expertise for safe practice with patients. NHS Education for Scotland (NES) is responsible for ensuring that quality management of postgraduate medical education and training meets the standards set by the General Medical Council (GMC)\(^1\). NES and GMC are committed through their pro-active approach to review and drive up standards.

\(^1\) The General Medical Council (GMC) protects patients and the general public by ensuring proper standards in the practice of medicine.
It is a formidable challenge to deliver quality training in more than 50 different specialties and to more than 5,500 trainees in many different geographical locations across Scotland.

NHS Education for Scotland (2008), The Governance of Postgraduate Medical Educational and Training

Currently there is a Shape of Training Review which is multi-agency, multi-government formal review of Postgraduate medical training.

The Quality Improvement Framework (QIF) sets out how the GMC will quality assure medical education and training in the UK. There are three levels of quality activity: quality assurance, quality management and quality control.

Quality assurance is the overarching activity under which both quality management and quality control sit. It includes all the policies, standards, systems and processes that are in place to maintain and improve the quality of medical education and training in the UK. This is the responsibility of the GMC.

Quality management is the responsibility of medical schools and postgraduate deaneries of NES. It refers to the processes through which these bodies ensure that the training their medical students and trainee doctors are receiving from local education providers (LEPs), meets the GMC’s standards.

LEPs are in turn responsible for quality control, i.e. ensuring that the education they are providing meets local, national and professional standards.

Incorporating medical practice standards to maintain the quality of medical training

NES has developed a Quality Framework which supports the continuous improvement of education for postgraduate medical trainees and outlines the performance management arrangements for the distribution of Additional Cost of Teaching (ACT) funding. This framework is underpinned by the principles of the GMC Quality Improvement Framework but also provides further information on the specific procedures and policies adopted by NES locally.

Under the GMC Quality Framework the Medical Directorate of NES and its four Scottish Deaneries are responsible to the Scottish Government for ensuring that quality management of postgraduate medical education and training delivered by the Scottish Health Boards is to the standards set by the GMC.

The purpose of the GMC is to protect, promote and maintain the health and safety of the public by ensuring proper standards in the practice of medicine.

To achieve this, one of our core legal functions is to regulate medical education and training so that patients now and in the future can be confident that they will receive safe, high quality medical care. We set standards and requirements that must be met on the ground; and check that they really are met, through quality assurance activity.

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2 The GMC Quality Framework is about assuring the quality of medical care for patients.
3 GMC Website www.gmc-uk.org/education/our_role_in_medical_education.asp
Health Boards as local education providers (LEPs) deliver the training, either in hospitals or GP surgeries, providing not only experiential learning but also theoretical learning. Doctors in training enter a programme and rotate through a number of hospitals, or general practices to make sure they get a wide range of experience in their chosen specialty before completing their training.

The role of NES is therefore to act as both an audit and quality improvement function – to make sure that LEPs deliver to the right standards and that they adequately cover the curriculum for each specialty. In addition there is a commitment to improvement in excellence and share good practice with local education providers. This is done by:

- overseeing the training and managing trainees’ progress through training programmes;
- getting regular reports and feedback from trainees through surveys, and following up complaints from trainees;
- ensuring that trainers are trained to be trainers whether educational or clinical supervisors;
- a programme of hospital visits ensuring that Health Boards are providing the time and resources to the trainees to get the best training in general practices and hospitals, plus ensuring that clinical supervision is in place and being safely carried out;
- receiving feedback from Health Boards.

NES thereby ensures that the same set of generic standards applies throughout Scotland and that these meet the standards required by the GMC. To support this work, NES has developed the following educational governance framework:

- quality teams in each of the Deaneries;
- training programme directors responsible for specific training programmes, with responsibility for educational supervisors who look at the long term education of each trainee and clinical supervisors on the ground who check that trainees are doing things safely;
- a representative on the Board of NES who is responsible for quality.

Postgraduate Deans provide strategic leadership and direction for postgraduate medical education and training in order to meet the requirements of the GMC taking account of advice of Royal Colleges and Faculties. For example they undertake strategic engagement with Boards and there is also an opportunity to feed into workforce planning groups.

Philip Cachia, Postgraduate Medical Dean (East Deanery)

We gather the data from multiple sources including Post Assessment Questionnaires, GMC National Training Surveys, Training Programme Directors, Specialist Training Committees, Trainees Advisory Group, Associate and PG Dean. We work in collaboration with the trainees, trainers and service so all units achieve GMC standards and also learn from areas of good practice to share with other units. In Scotland, all quality management teams work in close liaison to share practice and ensure the highest level of medical education throughout Scotland.

Adam Hill, Associate PG Dean Quality Management SE, NHS Education for Scotland
How quality management impacts on patient safety within local health settings

One example of the contribution of NES quality management to patient safety followed a hospital visit by quality management staff to a Health Board in Scotland. In addressing clinical governance concerns the Health Board decided that it could no longer safely provide emergency services stretched across two sites. By looking at educational and clinical governance issues around emergency care it became evident to the Health Board that there were not enough personnel to deliver safe medical care, even if all trainee posts were filled. In this case, the role of NES was to present evidence that given the number of consultants in post, clinical supervision such as cover at night was inadequate. The educational governance framework developed by NES also helped to clarify issues which addressed public concerns about cut backs in services and reassured the general public that patient safety was of prime concern in any changes in emergency care delivery.

The Scottish Government has set ambitious Health Service targets including the elimination of avoidable harm to patients. Education has an essential role to play which should not be overlooked just because it is difficult to quantify the impact of staff education on patient outcomes. Patient Safety education scenarios build on the established success of patient stories in using narrative and qualitative data as powerful levers for improvement. The scenarios in our portfolio demonstrate the impact of educational interventions on healthcare staff whilst caring for their patients.

Professor Philip Cachia  
Chair,  
NES Patient Safety Multi-disciplinary Group,  
Postgraduate Medical Dean

Useful links

GMC  
www.gmc-uk.org/education/postgraduate/information_for_deaneries.asp

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