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Constructing the “Ideal” First-Post Sonographer: Mapping the views of Ultrasound Department leads in the UK

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disclosure of conflict of interest

• There are no potential conflicts of interest or relevant relationships to report.

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background

• Current chronic lack of sonographers in the UK healthcare services (Society and College of radiographers, 2014).

• DEUS Postgraduate course University of Cumbria 2016

• Original HENW study investigated in-depth interviews with Ultrasound Department Leads throughout the North West of England.

• Research evaluated participants’ views on the best course(s) of prospective action in relation to:
  – future workforce development strategies;
  – proposed sonographic education models.

Design

• An opportunity sample of participants (N=20) was recruited from Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cumbria, working both within NHS Trusts (N=17) and independent providers (N=3).

• Interviews were semi-structured, conducted and recorded by telephone and transcribed verbatim. Key identifiers were removed to preserve participant anonymity. Mean interview length was 25 minutes.

• A Straussian Grounded Theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to investigate qualitative contributions, allowing for the accommodation of both range and depth in the data: Inductive Approach.

ideal identities

• Following their evaluations of the prospective educational models, participants were finally asked to outline the defining attributes of their “ideal” first-post sonographer.

• Expectation of repeated and consistent official lines on “Essential” and “Desirable” characteristics in role specs.

• Findings indicated something different, more closely related to evidence arising from current social psychological literature on Talent Identification (henceforth Ti: Miller, Cronin & Baker, 2015).

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sorting attributes

• When describing the ideal attributes that they would look for in a new sonographer, participants largely sorted them (implicitly and explicitly) into:
  1. The Innate (i.e. core properties of a person), and;
  2. The Malleable (i.e. skills that could be developed).

  “You have to be able to talk to people”

  “The ability to work autonomously”

  “The ability to prioritise a workload”

  “A fairly key facet is being able to cope with the academic requirements”

  “Communication is the most important thing”

  “The ability to prioritise a workload”
Trends

• **Technical** attributes (i.e. specifically sonographic proficiencies) were generally taken to be highly malleable; they had been trained and could be trained further.

• **Personal** attributes (i.e. nominally psychological traits and baseline social skills) were generally taken to be rather less malleable than technical attributes, and often innate.

'Manipulation of the machine should be a priority'

'It's important that it's a caring person'

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**“Technical” Smörgåsbord!**

- Resilience
- Equipment Manipulation
- Hand-Eye Coordination
- IT Skills
- Governance & Safety Knowledge
- Critical Thinking
- Communication Skills
- Time Management
- Knowing Limitations

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**“Personal” Smörgåsbord!**

- ACADEMIC ABILITY
- EMPATHY
- PERFECTISM/DRIVE
- COMMUNICATION SKILLS
- KNOWING LIMITATIONS
- TEAMWORK
- AUTONOMY
- RESILIENCE
- HAND-EYE COORDINATION

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**BUT!**

- There was some overlap between how technical and personal skills were defined.
  - E.g. Communication skills, resilience, hand-eye coordination and capacity to understand personal limitations were variably framed as technical or personal attributes, or both.

- There was also considerable variability in interpretation around the malleability of personal attributes such as resilience, academic capacity, empathy, drive, communication and teamwork.

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**Even the Psychobiological...?**

- Strong hand-eye coordination as innate:
  - "Good hand-eye coordination, they've got to have that dexterity to actually physically scan."

- Strong hand-eye coordination as malleable:
  - "There is a requirement for basic hand-eye coordination, which will be built on in any department."

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**Thus Far...**

- Participants did not always agree upon what constituted the desirable technical and/or personal attributes of a new sonographer.

- Participants did not always agree on which attributes were innate and/or malleable within a new sonographer.

- Participants did not always agree on whether the more malleable attributes of a new sonographer could be actively developed, or should be passively allowed to develop.
Personal Experience

Clear implications for candidate-selection

University of Cumbria 3 stage selection process:

- Academic,
- interpersonal/communication,
- hand eye coordination/spatial awareness,
- knowledge of Ultrasound,
- ‘Someone who is responsible enough to pick up the reporting challenges we face’

But ………

- Psychological work on TI indicates that no matter what the formal selection processes might be…

- “…no set of directives can [ever] be specified to cover all empirical contingencies (Garfinkel, 1967). As such, even if a prescribed model is nominally being utilised to the letter, there always remains some degree of situated (and thus experiential) interpretation involved in any involved decision.” (Miller, Cronin & Baker, 2015, p.646)

Manifesto Point

- So, we might propose, that some of the inconsistent opinions of employers with inconsistent first post sonographers inevitably gives rise to inconsistent ways of interpreting and valuing their attributes.

- Ultrasound training programmes are challenging and there are many facets to consider when designing a curriculum or developing a selection process

- ‘Our business is to address any inconsistency within the educational domain.

- ‘Have the patient at the forefront of everything you do’

- ‘Giving bad news, I think that should be a really big focus’

Summary

- There are varying opinions of the ideal attributes of a first post sonographer

- ‘I think the biggest thing is someone who wants a career in Ultrasound’

- Some attributes are unanimously seen as essential but there are differing opinions on whether these are ‘trainable’

- ‘I’m looking for someone who is training because they want to do this job’

- To invoke more consistent standards, we need to produce more consistent sonographers.

- ‘Can the initial selection process and curriculum help with this?’

References


