

Waring, Lorelei, Miller, Paul K., Sloane, Charles and Bolton, Gareth (2017) Constructing the “ideal” first-post sonographer: mapping the views of ultrasound department leads in the UK. In: UK Radiological Congress, 12-14 June 2017, Manchester, UK. (Unpublished)

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Constructing the "ideal" first-post sonographer: Mapping the views of ultrasound department leads in the UK

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Background The findings reported in this presentation emerge from a broader project investigating the future of Ultrasound education in the UK. Specifically addressed herein is the way in which the employers of prospective first-post sonographers assembled the attributes and aptitudes that would constitute an "ideal" person for such a role.

Method In line with the conventional methods of Straussian Grounded Theory, N=20 Ultrasound Department leads in the North West of England, working within NHS Trusts (N=17) and independent provision (N=3), were interviewed. All interviews were semi-structured, conducted and recorded by telephone and transcribed verbatim.

Results Participants cited "acquired" capacities such as advanced communication skills, good time management and the ability to work autonomously as essential in a first post-sonographer. They also argued that certain "inherent" personality traits should be sought out as part of a selection process; these attributes included patience, amicability, empathy, caring and a tendency towards perfectionism. Although academic aptitude was deemed important, the ability to be non-judgmental was deemed more so.

Conclusion In discussing the ideal attributes of a workplace sonographer, it became clear that the participants had a clear sense of which were desirable and undesirable. However, and in a more novel vein, it was equally clear that they also held strong and relatively consistent views on which kinds of personal attribute were static (i.e. immanent qualities of a prospective employee) and which were malleable (i.e. could be altered/improved with on-the-job training). This, it is contended, has significant import for educators and trainees alike.