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Title: Coping and the plain radiography student: Professionalism and the crippling dilemma of accountability before and after graduation

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Abstract

Background: While the HCPC standards for radiography have not altered significantly since their initial publication, an examination of current NHS medical imaging workload data and case mix^{2,3} reveals that real-world medical imaging practice itself is undergoing a period of sustained change and increasing professionalisation. This movement places enhanced accountability on even the most junior of clinicians, against an escalating variety of practical clinical tasks. Building on the work of Sloane and Miller⁴ regarding radiography unit managers' perceptions around the "fitness for purpose" of new radiography graduates, the findings detailed herein explore in greater depth the relationship between contradictory structural pressures in UK Higher Education (HE) and the NHS.

Methods: Using a Straussian model of Grounded Theory,^{1,4} extended accounts provided by N=20 radiography department leads were analysed.

Results: Three themes emerged: (a) Participants voiced a degree of frustration around having to chase new graduates to undertake core roles and professional activities. (b) Newly qualified staff were regularly reported to have difficulty in maintaining a work life balance in 24/7 medical imaging services. (c) Recent graduates found difficulty in taking responsibility for their own mistakes.

Conclusions: The recent shifts in accountability-modelling in HE and the NHS place new radiography graduates in a profoundly difficult position regarding their adaptation/coping capacities. Shifting suddenly from an environment (HE) in which nearly all accountability is presently placed upon their lecturers and clinical tutors, into a professional context (NHS) in which all accountability is placed upon them, was noted to be crippling for them in many cases.

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