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P236 Addressing the UK's sonographer shortage through new initiatives higher education: Evaluating the perspectives of ultrasound unit managers
Lorelei Waring; Paul Miller; Amanda Marland; Shelley Smart
University of Cumbria

Background: Over the last decade, progressively fewer available posts in UK sonography have been filled[1,2]. As such, interventions in higher education (HE) to attract new blood have become a matter of increasing interest for medical imaging research[3,4]. While this corpus of literature has produced a range of actionable findings to date, the views of employers in clinical ultrasound around how the issue might be addressed in HE have remained largely unresearched.

Methods: Three models of ultrasound education were proposed to N=20 ultrasound department leads in public (n=17) and private (n=3) units:
1. The direct entry undergraduate model (DEUM);
2. The direct entry postgraduate model (DEPM); and
3. The 3+1 postgraduate model (31PM).

Participants were encouraged to express a preference, reasons for their preference, and which components of each model were desirable/undesirable. Using a Straussian model of Grounded Theory[5,6], the extended accounts provided were analysed.

Results: Of the participants, n=9 indicated a sole preference for the DEPM, while n=3 indicated a sole preference for the 31PM. However, n=8 found variable strengths/weaknesses in each. Qualitative concerns thematised as:
1. The feed of undergraduate entry programmes into extant pay banding.
2. A lack of life, communication and time management skills synonymous with younger graduates.
3. Sustaining the current quality of sonographers without a prior background in plain radiography.
4. Condensing ultrasound learning into too brief a period.

Conclusions: There is no simple solution in HE to the sonographer shortage. Unit managers' perspectives add depth to our understanding of what might be required.

[1]. Society and College of Radiographers 2014, Sonographer workforce survey analysis. SCoR; 2014. 2. Society and College of Radiographers. Developing and growing the sonographer workforce: Education and training needs. SCoR; 2009. 3. Migration Advisory Committee. Skilled shortage sensible: Full review of the "shortage specialty"[5,6]. The research reported herein is designed to lend qualitative depth to our current understanding of the "coal-face" situation in the UK's ultrasound units from the perspective of their managers.

Methods: Using a Straussian model of Grounded Theory[5,6], extended accounts provided by N=20 ultrasound department leads in public (n=17) and private (n=3) units were analysed.

Results: Three global themes emerged from the analysis. The first addresses how a lack of staff in the broader economy has created a migratory system that works chiefly to the advantage of the most junior and the most senior clinicians, often leaving mid-career professionals in a borderline impossible situation. The second highlights how the knowledge economy in many departments is being stymied by early retirement and late-career migration, rendering questions about how advanced expertise mid-career professionals in a borderline impossible situation. The third underscores how it is often workplace instability, rather than simple short staffing, that is most damaging to staff morale, planning capacity and clinical self-efficacy.

Conclusions: This work ideally opens up debates on some largely undiscussed practical contingencies of the sonographer shortage, and can help ground future deductive research in the real-world experience of key actors.