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Editor's choice

Innovations in primary care to promote general practice as a career to medical students

The editorial on how medical schools can encourage students to choose general practice as a career¹ is extremely timely. The East Midlands has a significant primary care recruitment and retention issue. We would like to share some of our innovations at Nottingham Medical School that aim to enable students to make informed decisions about career choices including primary care, and nurture those with a particular interest if they wish to 'choose general practice'.

- We have close links with the student GP Society to facilitate regular sessions with GPs with special interests, focus groups, and encouraging visits to RCGP Euston Square and national conferences.
- We have set up a Buddy Scheme with GP registrars for medical students that supports interested GP Society members through medical school to specialty applications.
- There is significant GP representation on the medical school admissions panel. Multiple mini-interviews have replaced the traditional interviews and will now include primary care scenarios.
- A Widening Access project promoting GP careers to local academically-able pupils from secondary schools that don't traditionally attain medical school admissions.
- From September 2016 we are doubling the clinical contact time in primary care and encouraging all GP tutors to be role models for our students; 'Being a GP can be whatever you want it to be.'
- We are planning 'open half-day release' sessions with local GP

schemes and Primary Care Professor Society presentations and research workshops.

- 'First5®' young GPs in the division have developed a short PowerPoint presentation on 'Why choose GP' to deliver to local F1 doctors and as a podcast resource.
- We are collaborating with the Nottingham Medical Graduates of 2016 for a 1-year reunion dinner and organising a careers fair in the afternoon.

We hope that these innovations provide some thought and encouragement, and may be adapted to other medical schools.

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Encouraging medical students to pursue general practice

The UK Foundation Programme Office F2 career destination report suggests some of the more 'academic' medical schools have lower proportions of GP core trainees.¹ Why? Is being a GP seen as less academically worthy? Or are these medical schools inadvertently discouraging general practice as a career?

From the start I have wanted to be a GP. However, this longstanding belief has been challenged on every clinical placement so far. Why? Why do hospital practitioners consider it their duty to dissuade you from general practice and persuade you towards hospital medicine?

In my experience a disproportionate amount of clinical placements take place in secondary and tertiary care; this lack of long-term exposure could be detrimental towards general practice. My aspiration has not changed but many fellow students see becoming a GP as a second-choice option; medical schools need to do more to make general practice seem exciting, attractive, and vital.²

As suggested, increased exposure to inspiring, enthusiastic GPs would open many students' eyes to the hugely varied and rewarding career of a GP. There has been minimal contact with academic GPs apart from via the voluntary GP society. Allowing GPs to have larger (and more public) roles within the curriculum early in pre-clinical and clinical training could help make the career an active choice, not a fallback option. However, I do not believe a simple increase in the quantity of GP undergraduate training will help. Quality is key. The GPs delivering this training need to be positive role models for this to work; if they are demoralised or overworked it could backfire and further exacerbate the recruitment problem.

Alarming, I have been told by a number of GP tutors NOT to become a GP. This strong advice has been brokered with warnings of a poorer work-life balance than advised, poor job satisfaction, and an endless river of paperwork diverting attention from patients. Is it any wonder that there is a struggle to recruit medical students to GP training?

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2. McDonald P, Jackson B, Alberti H, Rosenthal J.