

The Heart of the Matter

Improving the dynamic of the first GP training term: A focus on Registrar and Supervisor perspectives

The cornerstone of postgraduate GP training is the effective supervision of GP registrars by experienced GP supervisors in practices accredited for training.

GP registrars and their GP Supervisors share common goals and have similar expectations of training and desired outcomes. Or do they?

The Heart of the Matter survey was developed to better understand the dynamic/relationships between supervisors and registrars in the first supervised training period.

KEY SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

1. A strong relationship between registrar and supervisor is essential

The heart of the matter, for successful supervision and learning is an exceptional dynamic between registrar and GP supervisor. In selecting their training placement, registrars pay attention to supervisor personality and alignment of both parties' values. Trust, agreement and bond creates an effective 'educational alliance'.

2. Expectations of both registrar and supervisor need to be shared and worked through from the beginning

Registrars need to understand what to expect in advance in relation to the working conditions as do supervisors. If not, the data in this study suggest problems arise.

3. Excellent, ongoing communication between registrar and supervisor is the key to success

Good communication is essential between the registrar and supervisor. Supervisors want registrars to give clear and timely feedback about work-related matters – this is very important but not happening as much as supervisors require. The response of the supervisor to the registrar when they ask for help is important. The relationship between the two could be strengthened through a variety of aids which support these conversations.

4. Learnings/Opportunities

The survey revealed some new insights for WAGPET, which usually has no direct observation except when a serious incident or training relationship break downs:

- Early check in that focuses on the quality of the relationship between registrar and supervisor would have significant benefits.
- Highly vocal registrars and supervisors have distorted WAGPET's perception in the past.
- Discovery of these issues early on in training will enable early intervention, improving the likelihood of a positive training experience for these registrars.

5. Challenges

By the very nature of being a GP registrar the following challenges exist:

- Many patients are a 'new patient' to the clinic which presents its own challenges.
- The fee-for-service arrangements associated with salary complicates the length of time the registrar can allocate to these new patients.
- The patient may be a drop-in not wanting to wait to see the senior GPs but have urgent complex issues.

WHAT, WHEN, HOW

In November 2020, WAGPET surveyed registrars and supervisors to better understand the dynamic between them in the first supervised GP term by determining differences in their respective levels of need in relation to 28 statements covering six areas:

- PRIOR TO COMMENCING AT THE PRACTICE (3 statements)
- WORKING ALLIANCE (7)
- PRACTICE ENVIRONMENT (3)
- CONSULTATIONS (4)
- REGISTRAR TRAITS (5)
- SUPERVISOR TRAITS (6)

Of 424 registrars eligible to take the survey, 221 responded (a majority female, 145). Of the 201 eligible supervisors, 116 responded (a majority male, 77).

THE FINDINGS

Each area contained paired statements to elicit scores from each respondent about the importance of each statement and their own satisfaction in having it met in their first GP term. Overall, satisfaction for statements rated as important was high. Nonetheless, 'under-served' needs (which are important items eliciting low satisfaction ratings) for registrars spanned all six areas.

Under-served needs for GP supervisors also spanned all six areas although not identically to registrars. The highest under-served average was for statements covering the area PRIOR TO COMMENCING AT THE PRACTICE.

Under-served needs were defined as statements rated by the respondent as both important and not satisfied.

REGISTRARS' TOP FIVE UNDER-SERVED NEEDS

- Registrars understand the working conditions to expect [PRIOR]
- Supervisors establish clear triggers & guidelines for when registrars must seek advice and/or assistance. [CONSULTATIONS]
- Registrars understand the supervisor's expectations for the working relationship. [PRIOR]
- Supervisors are proactive in identifying a registrar's learning goals. [ALLIANCE]
- Registrars and supervisors negotiate expectations for how to work and train together. [ALLIANCE]

SUPERVISORS' TOP FIVE UNDER-SERVED NEEDS

- Registrars understand the working conditions to expect. [PRIOR]
- Registrars communicate their expectations regarding the work-related aspects of the placement. [PRIOR]

- Registrars give clear and timely feedback to supervisors about work-related matters. [ALLIANCE]
- Registrars understand the supervisor's expectations for the working relationship. [ALLIANCE]
- Registrars take the opportunity to learn from all members of the practice team. [REGISTRARS]

THE COMMON GROUND

16 of the 28 statements were considered important by 80% or more respondents in both groups. These 16 statements are listed below in decreasing order of importance to registrars. Six statements among these 16 considered important by 90% or more respondents in both groups are presented in bold. These statements are common ground for both registrars and GP supervisors as foundations they share to enhance the effectiveness of the first GP placement, namely:

- **Registrars are respectful to all members of the practice team.** [REGISTRAR TRAITS]
- Registrars understand the working conditions to expect. [PRIOR]
- **Registrars regularly have discussions with their supervisor about clinical problems and patient management.** [ALLIANCE]
- **Registrars learn to work effectively with all members of the practice team.** [PRACTICE]
- Registrars are provided with sufficient space to work effectively. [PRACTICE]
- Supervisors give clear and honest feedback to registrars. [ALLIANCE]
- **Members of the practice team are supportive of the registrar's wellbeing.** [PRACTICE]
- **Registrars can approach supervisors whenever they need to.** [SUPERVISOR]
- Supervisors teach registrars how to manage uncertainty during consultations. [CONSULTATIONS]
- Supervisors support registrars while they build confidence during their initial patient consultations. [CONSULTATIONS]
- **Registrars give clear and timely feedback to supervisors about work-related matters.** [ALLIANCE]
- Registrars understand the supervisor's expectations for the working relationship. [PRIOR]
- Registrars and supervisors negotiate expectations for how to work and train together. [ALLIANCE]
- Supervisors are respectful of the registrar's views and ideas. [SUPERVISOR]
- Registrars take the opportunity to learn from all members of the practice team. [REGISTRAR]
- Supervisors establish clear triggers & guidelines for when registrars must seek advice and/or assistance. [CONSULTATIONS]

WHAT'S NEXT

This survey gives WAGPET an insight into the 'mystery' of the relationship at the heart of postgraduate GP training. The findings will be shared with the GP Supervisor Advisory Council, the Registrar Advisory Council, GPRA and GPSA, as well as other stakeholders. Feedback from these consultations will be used to improve WAGPET's support for the apprenticeship-based first-term training placement for registrars and supervisors.

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