

TITLE: TRAINING RURAL GENERAL SURGEONS FOR A FUTURE IN SCOTLAND

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Introduction

Recent workforce projections have identified an imminent crisis in RGH surgical staffing in Scotland. Over the next 8 years, 11-14 replacement rural surgeons will be required. Since a fifth of Scotland's population lives in a remote, rural or island setting, sustaining this important workforce is critical.

The North of Scotland Deanery is responsible for postgraduate medical training across the 5 Health Boards in northern Scotland (Grampian, Highland, Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles). This area includes six Rural General Hospitals (RGH), all of which offer an acute general surgical service as well as limited non-specialist elective surgery. The Rural General Surgeons are also required to treat patients with orthopaedic, urological, obstetric and other non-general surgical complaints.

However, recent changes to surgical training in the UK have meant that the "generality" of surgery has been lost, with trainees mainly limited to their own specialty and an increasing tendency towards tertiary sub-specialisation. In recognition of the special needs of the rural surgeons, innovative thinking was needed and a new curriculum module for Remote and Rural (R&R) Surgery was developed. This has been approved by PMETB (Postgraduate Medical Education & Training Board). Trainees wishing to specialize in this area are required to gain specific competencies outside the normal General Surgery boundaries and to have evidence of completion of these modules to achieve a CCT. Rural Surgery is not currently popular with many current trainee general surgeons, who have usually been attracted into tertiary sub-specialties in urban settings. Until now, training towards R&R competencies has not been readily available, but European Working Time Directive legislation means that training hours are limited and additional funding was needed.



Pilot project

To this end, the North of Scotland Deanery has developed a 2 year Remote and Rural Surgical Fellowship based on the Rural Training Pathways curricular developments (see companion poster). This will equip Fellows with the necessary competencies to become RGH surgeons and introduce them to the benefits and pleasures of a rural doctor's lifestyle. Funding has been obtained in partnership between the Scottish Government and the Health Boards. These unique Fellowships are being advertised internationally and will be available to surgeons who are already on, or are eligible to be on the GMC Specialist Register, as well as to current trainees in General Surgery in the UK. Training will be tailored to individual requirements (Fellow's and Service's) and will be undertaken in both RGHs and major teaching hospital settings, with specific end-points and assessments. We are also exploring options for proleptic consultant appointments with partner Health Boards.

It is hoped that this tailored training opportunity will provide the necessary surgical workforce for our rural areas for the future. We plan to train 2-4 fellows at any one time and it is expected that the first Fellowship will commence towards the end of 2008.

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