

Medical Workforce Challenges in Scotland

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Objectives

Between 1996 and 2015, the number of consultants in Scotland rose by 90%, while the number of doctors in training rose by 50%. Typically, trainees in Scotland undertake 2 years of foundation training, followed either by 3-4 years of GP training, or 2-3 years of core and 4-6 years of specialty training. The aim of this study was to analyse available data to understand key issues in relation to medical workforce planning in Scotland. Over the past decade there have been changes to immigration regulations and reforms of postgraduate medical education and training and currently there are challenges in filling both recognised training posts and posts for fully trained doctors in certain specialties and locations.

Methods

Data was sourced from available resources including the Scottish Board for Academic Medicine, the General Medical Council, the UK Foundation Programme Office, Information Services Division of National Services Scotland and NHS Education for Scotland.

Results

There were 993 entrants to Scottish medical schools in 2014 (472 (47.5%) from Scotland, 263 (26.5%) from the Rest of UK, 58 (6%) from Europe, 200 (20%) from overseas). Approximately 40% of overseas medical graduates will complete Foundation training and approximately 10% will undertake Specialty / GP training in Scotland. In 2014, there were 789 graduates from the Scottish Foundation programme with 814 advertised core / GP training posts. In 2015, there were 808 graduates from the Scottish Foundation programme with 856 advertised core / GP training posts. UK data on the career destinations of Foundation graduates indicates that only 52% immediately progress to specialty training in the UK with 13.4% taking a career break or leaving the profession, 12.9% still seeking employment, 9.2% undertaking a service (non-training) appointment in the UK, 6.1% taking up an appointment outside the UK, 5.5% taking up another appointment within the UK eg anatomy demonstrator or further study, 0.5% taking a locum post and 0.4% undertaking specialty training outside the UK. Although most Foundation graduates do subsequently return to a training post, GMC data indicates that only 85% of graduates from Scottish Medical schools who complete Foundation training enter the UK medical workforce within 3 years. Of 136,809 doctors who have a designated body and Primary Medical Qualification (PMQ) in Scotland, England, Wales or Northern Ireland, 14,482 have a designated body in Scotland but 19,977 have a Scottish PMQ, indicating a net transfer of 5495 (27%) Scottish graduates to other parts of the UK.

Conclusion

There is a net transfer of doctors with a Scottish PMQ to other parts of the UK. The majority of overseas graduates from Scottish Medical Schools do not seem to remain in Scotland to undertake postgraduate training. There are currently insufficient Foundation Programmes graduates to fill all available core / GP training posts in Scotland. Scottish Government have recently announced a modest increase in Medical School places to address some of these issues, however further consideration needs to be given to the supply chain for Foundation and Specialty training in Scotland.