CONSULTANT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION – WHAT APPLICANTS SEEK IN A POST. A REGIONAL SURVEY

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Introduction Nearly half of advertised gastroenterology and hepatology posts remain unfilled (Royal College of Physicians, 2019). It is therefore important to identify key positive and negative factors trainees consider when applying for a consultant job to construct appealing and resilient services, particularly for hard-to-fill posts.

Methods An online questionnaire was sent to south west gastroenterology trainees and to newly-appointed consultants to rate the importance of each factor when considering a consultant job.

Results Our 36 (21 male, 15 female) respondents from a possible of 44 (82%), worked across all training grades and mostly full time (89%). The majority felt geography was very important (n=22, 62%) and personal experience of working in the hospital important (n=19, 53%). Enticing factors to apply included availability of specialist nurses and protected time to develop training and subspecialty.

Financial inducements were less important. General medical on calls was the only factor which actively discouraged job application (n=23, 64%) and links to academic institutions were deemed less important in over half of respondents. 78% of trainees would consider applying for a consultant job outside their training deanship; the influence of the availability to work less than full was inconsistent.

Conclusion This regional survey provides an important insight into applicant views to assist with consultant recruitment and retention. Removing general medicine from gastroenterology, enabling time to develop clinical and managerial skills and availability of specialist nurses are key attractive factors.

Whilst geographical location cannot be changed, personal experience was rated a strong factor influencing job considerations; rotating senior trainees in peripheral hospitals provides an opportunity to negotiate an appealing job plan not previously considered as well as benefiting departments struggling to recruit.

For trainees in the south west financial inducements and academic links were not considered important considerations. Working less than full time (LTFT) was of varying importance but the LTFT workforce is likely to increase in the future as more female trainees obtain substantive consultant posts (Rutter, C, 2018). With the change to pension age rules, consultant jobs should encourage more applications and hopefully retain the existing consultant workforce as more desirable roles become available.

This has many unique challenges (particularly geographical spread and population density). As such these findings may not be applicable to large conurbations where further surveys are warranted.