

Management: the Holy Grail of a Consultant job.

Introduction

When a team is looking to the consultant for support, direction, vision and leadership, how can a new consultant deliver?

Until Darzi's proposal for more clinician involvement in management (1) and the creation of Darzi fellows to increase clinicians' managerial competence, trainees' exposure to management was limited. Consultants have therefore traditionally learned management "on the job."

There were two options to improve my (AS) management experience: either to take a year 'out of programme' to pursue a Darzi Fellowship or to do a Management module in a university hospital. As I did not wish to reduce my clinical exposure, and delay my CCT, I chose the second option.

This is my personal account of the benefits, limitations and the innovation needed to complete AIM's(2) tasks.

Benefits

Clear guidance from AIM (2) to help an anaesthetic trainee gain more management experience.

A management course is essential, as it advises on NHS management, funding and strategic planning. I chose Keele's Management for Anaesthetic Specialist Registrars. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I found the interactive personality typing particularly helpful in gaining insight into improving my strengths and guarding against my weaknesses.

I was unable to gain a meeting with the Chief executive of my Trust but, on his secretary's suggestion, I attended the 'open access' Board of Directors meeting. This was a meeting worth attending as it raised my awareness of the Trust's strategic plans for the future. To point out a few interesting points in the meeting, I was reassured by how high patient care came in the agenda and how strongly government targets and monetary matters figured in the discussion.

The Clinical Governance Steering Group meeting was another interesting afternoon. These consultants obviously have a great commitment to maintaining and improving standards of patient care. The one thing that stuck to me most was the importance of audits' conclusions to drive up quality of care.

Shadowing the Theatre Manager was another interesting half-day. Patient cancellations were addressed and the need for an Overnight Intensive Recovery unit was highlighted. Though the need ranked highly, the process of setting one up was the limiting factor.

Shadowing the Clinical Lead's secretary, in planning the next six months rota, as well as personally managing the trainees' rota for 3 months gave me an insight into the demands on the anaesthetic service.

Shadowing the College Tutor undertaking interviews for future posts proved to be an unachievable task, as very few hospitals conduct interviews due to Modernizing Medical Careers. After much communication with the college tutor, programme director and London deanery workforce-planning officer, I established that there is no provision for trainees to attend interviews as an observer. So I am attending medical student interviews.

Audit proved a challenging experience. Though not within the AIM guidelines, managing a project is a requirement of the department's management module curriculum. After a failed attempt at prospective data collection and multiple visits to the audit & medical records departments, retrospective data collection phase is finally underway and I will be reporting my findings to a multidisciplinary project team, to help write up the new Trust Guideline on the management of diabetes.

Limitations

Shadowing my Clinical Lead proved difficult due to the unfortunate timing of the request, as he was involved in job planning for the seventy-five consultants in the department. I am waiting to reschedule my appointment.

Conclusion

An abundance of will power, drive, persistence and self-reliance are needed to gain informal management training. Most people I approached were willing to help but competing demands limited them. However, the feedback I have given to the module supervisor (HH) will enable more formal structures to be set up for future trainees. Though formal management training could be difficult, a supportive educational supervisor with a keen interest in management could start up a flexible management module in any hospital to improve their trainees' management skills. Prioritization of management training for trainees by senior management will facilitate greater clinician engagement in the future.

References

- 1 A high quality workforce: NHS Next Stage review 30 June 2008 Department of Health
- 2 Anaesthetists In Management (AIM): Objectives of a management module (2005)