

Inspiring a generation: A Renal Taster Weekend for prospective nephrologists

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Introduction:

In 2018 41% of National Training Numbers (NTNs) for Renal Medicine in the UK remained unfilled. There was significant variation in the percentage of filled posts across the UK (0 to 100%). Lack of competition for registrar posts may result in less dedicated and talented doctors entering the profession. In addition, understaffing of renal units is likely to negatively impact on registrar training and crucially, patient care. To address this, we ran a not-for-profit Taster Weekend to encourage junior doctors to apply for a career in renal medicine. Our aims were to provide information on the training programme and application process, address concerns raised by participants and inspire a future generation of nephrologists.

Methods:

The Taster Course was piloted as a one-day event in 2017 and participant feedback was used to improve and extend the programme for 2018. The course was endorsed by the Renal Association and advertised via a website (www.renal.org/renal-tastercourse), the Royal College of Physicians newsletter, communication with Renal Training Programme Directors across the UK, Twitter and posters in local hospitals. Participants were charged £100 to attend the two-day event; fees contributed to costs of venue and equipment hire as well as speakers' travel and accommodation where necessary.

The programme (fig. 1) covered the application process, Renal medicine as a career, education sessions on interesting clinical topics and practical sessions on renal biopsy and central line insertion. Mock interviews were also offered. Teaching was delivered as lectures and small-group sessions by Registrars and Consultants from throughout the UK.

Anonymised feedback on the structure, content and running of the course was collected. Participants were asked to provide information regarding their current level of training, previous experience of renal medicine and how likely they were to apply for an NTN in renal medicine before and after the weekend.

Results:

Twenty-four participants attended from across the UK, ranging from FY1 to ST2b ACCS trainees. The majority had been made aware of the course via email from local postgraduate deaneries. Ninety-two percent rated it as good value for money. Feedback suggested that participants had most enjoyed the practical stations, small group teaching and careers advice. They approved of the variety and enthusiasm of the speakers. Suggestions regarding future improvements included the addition of a talk on common renal emergencies and further information regarding work-life balance.

Ninety-two percent of participants stated they were more likely to apply to renal training having attended the course. Factors that discouraged individuals from applying included poor work-life balance, too great a focus on academia, dislike of practical procedures, the need to work as a medical registrar and a lack of Consultant posts.

Discussion:

There is a significant lack of applicants to renal training across the UK. Innovative means of addressing this recruitment crisis are therefore urgently required. The Renal Taster Weekend increased the likelihood of junior doctors choosing a career in Renal medicine. Information collected regarding factors discouraging junior doctors from applying to such a fascinating and rewarding specialty should be used to guide future recruitment.