

Supporting GP Education in Pain Medicine: Pain Clinic Attachments for GP Trainees.

Background

In 2004, primary care management of patients with chronic pain was estimated to account for 4.6 million GP appointments per year. Chronic pain is more common than COPD and diabetes, and these patients consult their GP around five times more frequently than those who don't have chronic pain. Despite these compelling figures, formal GP attachments in Pain Medicine are not commonly part of Specialist training schemes in General Practice (STGP). In 2013 the Pain Clinic at the Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust became part of the training programme as part of a selection of training rotations. STGP trainees in their second year of specialty training can choose a year of training in Palliative Care & Rehabilitation Medicine (6 months) and Pain Management (6 months). The scheme is now in its second year and proven to be beneficial and inspiring for both STGP trainees and the Pain Management Department.

How does the attachment work?

The attachment was developed in conjunction with GP trainers and the local postgraduate education department after a joint review of the STGP curriculum. Funding for the post comes from Health Education South West, managed through the local Postgraduate Education Department. Trainees gain experience working alongside Consultants, Extended Scope Physiotherapists, Psychologists and Nurses as part of a multidisciplinary team. The broad aims of the training are for trainees to gain in-depth knowledge and practice of the subspecialty of pain management in all available settings - acute, persistent and cancer related pain. This includes the biopsychosocial assessment of patients, developing management plans, and contribution to the local pain management course. GP trainees can also choose to learn procedures that can be easily applied in primary care (such as acupuncture). STGP trainees are involved in quality improvement projects, clinical audit and teaching of medical students. All activities take place in a supported and supervised environment.

What are the benefits for the Pain Clinic?

GP trainees are usually well informed about developments in primary care, and allow us – the secondary care Pain Management Service - to forge closer links with community medicine. It has brought better understanding of the difficulties faced by both primary and secondary care, and the limitations of what can be offered by both. It is hoped that these links will lead to improved primary care management of pain in Cornwall, appropriate referrals and more integrated management of patients with pain. From a service perspective, GP trainees, once competent, run clinics alongside consultants, that has improved pain clinic capacity. The experience has been universally positive.

Benefits for the GP: a GP trainee perspective

"The new pain attachment has given me an invaluable insight into the condition. I have learnt a great deal about its complex psychological, social and biological factors, which will enable me to manage the condition so much better in the community. The experience in taking such a holistic approach towards my patients has also been hugely beneficial to the rest of my GP training. I have found the subject fascinating; I have learnt many new skills, including acupuncture; and will continue to share my experiences with my colleagues in primary care. I hope that future GP training placements in the pain department will result in improved use of services, improved integrated care and forge links to tackle some of the issues faced around pain."

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