What do General Practitioners think of the new Professional Competence Scheme?

Abstract:

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Abstract

The Irish Medical Practitioners Act 2007 places a statutory obligation on all registered Medical Practitioners to maintain their competence by participating in a recognised Professional Competence Scheme. A questionnaire survey was conducted among 48 GPs attending educational meetings to see if doctors had concerns about the Professional Competence Scheme and to ask if they felt they had the necessary time, skills and knowledge to carry out an audit. Twenty-eight GPs (58%) had concerns regarding their participation in the Professional Competence Scheme; 75% were concerned about the time required, and 67% felt they needed further education about the scheme. Although 73% of doctors reported that they had carried out an audit in practice, 60% have never had any teaching on audit and 85% would like teaching in this area. Only 48% of the group surveyed felt that audit was practical in their current practice. Doctors have some concerns about the new Professional Competence Scheme, including the audit component. In particular, they report a requirement for more teaching in this area, and are concerned about the time involved.

Introduction

The Medical Practitioners Act 2007 places a statutory obligation on all registered Medical Practitioners to maintain their professional competence by participating in a recognised Professional Competence Scheme. Professional Competence Scheme consists of two elements: continuing professional development (CPD) and audit. Revalidation for GPs has been on the agenda in the European Union for some time and it is widely acknowledged that the training received by newly qualified doctors is not sufficient for a lifetime in practice. Doctors are regarded as being on a lifelong journey during which they must keep up with advances in their field and learn in the context of the problems that arise in daily practice. This learning is expected to take place through CPD which achieves its best results when it is performed over time, through multiple learning activities and sources of information, is integrated within daily clinical practice and involves educational meetings which include a mix of didactics and interaction.

The inclusion of audit as a requirement acknowledges the large body of work documenting its importance in monitoring and improving the quality of patient care. This is the first Irish study to look at doctors concerns regarding the new Professional Competence Scheme.

Methods

The Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP) runs continuing medical education (CME) meetings for GPs in each county in the Republic of Ireland. In February 2011, just prior to the introduction of the compulsory Professional Competence Scheme, a questionnaire was devised based on previous work; this was handed out at the end of each meeting and asked specific questions about knowledge of CPD, and audit, time, skills, and ability to carry out an audit in practice. In this study, 85% of doctors expressed a desire for more teaching about audit. The ICGP provides web-based online information to address some of this need but more external checks on the quality of clinical audit undertaken by GPs, and there is evidence that a significant proportion may require further educational support in this area.

Objective evidence of performance will be required to support the annual CPD of doctors; it is for this reason that audit comprises part of the Professional Competence Scheme. Previous research has highlighted the necessity for external checks on the quality of clinical audit undertaken by GPs, and there is evidence that a significant proportion may require further educational support in this area. This learning is expected to take place through CPD which achieves its best results when it is performed over time, through multiple learning activities and sources of information, is integrated within daily clinical practice and involves educational meetings which include a mix of didactics and interaction.

Results

Out of the 52 GPs that attended Waterford CME meetings in February 2011, 48 agreed to participate in this survey (92%). The key findings are summarized in the table below.

Discussion

The Professional Competence Scheme require both full-time and part-time doctors to fulfill the same hours per annum for both audit and CPD; the time required to carry out these activities currently has to be managed by the GP in her or his working day. This is a challenge given the multiple roles taken on by GPs in practice.

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