Just four UK postgraduate surgical training posts meet national quality standards, study finds

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Only four early years postgraduate surgical training posts in the UK meet nationally approved minimum quality standards, researchers have found. They have called for the Joint Committee on Surgical Training to act urgently to tackle stark deficiencies in surgical training.

The analysis by the Association of Surgeons in Training and the British Orthopaedic Trainees’ Association looked at the training of doctors working at the equivalent of senior house officer grade in postgraduate surgical training or service posts.1

The researchers analysed the training of 2269 of these doctors in all 10 surgical specialties across 141 NHS trusts.

They found that 541 doctors were in training posts, and of these posts only four (0.3%) met all the national quality standards set by the Joint Committee on Surgical Training. All four were core surgical training posts in general surgery. Two were in Scotland and two in the Kent, Surrey, and Sussex region.

When the researchers looked at compliance with individual standards, they found that just 13.2% of training posts allowed trainees the two hours of facilitated teaching time they were supposed to have each week. Just 6% of posts gave all trainees the opportunity to attend one multidisciplinary team meeting a week, and 13.3% gave trainees the level of access to education facilities they were supposed to have.

The researchers said that the regular audit and publication of whether a post met the joint committee’s criteria should be standard and not aspirational. They said that this would allow trainees to make better choices of post and would enable heads of schools of surgery to identify where improvements were needed.

The researchers said that the analysis had “highlighted stark deficiencies in the current delivery of early years postgraduate surgical training programmes in the UK.”

They concluded, “The Joint Committee on Surgical Training and the Specialties Advisory Committees must act urgently to address issues highlighted, and minimise the impact of rising external pressures on surgical training.”