Education and Training

Management supervision for senior registrars: an example from child psychiatry

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Many trainees contemplating becoming a consultant admit that their greatest concern is how they will find their way through the NHS bureaucracy and politics and relate to managers and colleagues who themselves are embroiled in these webs. We have therefore made management a high profile component of senior registrars' training during their 16-months placement in the Centre. As well as attending formal courses run by the King's Fund or the Region, trainees are exposed to diverse management issues and we ensure that the weekly hour of consultant supervision includes discussion of managerial and clinical matters.

Management is not only about participating in organisational structures and procedures but is also a function of interpersonal behaviour: both aspects need to be understood. For example, subtle group processes of a committee are as likely to determine its effectiveness as the clarity of its constitution and agenda. Knowledge of managerial structures and processes can be acquired by trainees in a variety of ways.

Assuming managerial responsibilities

One of the best methods of learning how to do something is to do it and senior registrars are expected to take responsibility for a number of tasks during the placement. They take their turn chairing the weekly team meeting and act as librarian for the Centre. An opportunity always arises for them to organise a substantial training event, whether it is an in-house workshop or a major conference. From time to time they are invited to represent the team at outside committee meetings and to take responsibility for getting something done on behalf of the team, such as devising new video consent forms or researching suitable computer equipment. However, trainees are never coerced into taking on unpopular tasks, such as being secretary to a committee, with the pretence that "... it would be good for your training". (A suggested response to this regrettably common practice is: "And so, I am told, is learning how to say 'No' ".)

Importantly, all the tasks can be discussed in consultant supervision. Beforehand, the trainee learns how to plan a project and anticipate hurdles and afterwards the repercussions of their efforts can be reviewed. One fortunate trainee in a new post was able to help plan and negotiate her own training, under supervision.

Shadowing a manager

Being a 'fly on the wall' to someone engaged in management can provide a valuable insight into the duties they undertake, as well as their problem-solving strategies. We are extremely grateful that the Director of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service arranges for senior registrars to spend at least two half-days with her, including attending meetings and reading relevant documents. The trainee is invited to ask the Director points of fact, but also to monitor the dilemmas and pressures she faces and her coping strategies.

Tutorials

Early in senior registrars' placements, consultant supervision time is allocated to tutorials on specific managerial topics. The first describes the 'Structure of the Trust', including the roles of different managers and the inter-related system of committees. Another topic covered is 'Budgets and the Purchaser-Provider Relationship', to include discussion of budget statements, extra-contractual referrals, GP fund-holding, business planning and quality standards. The tutorial on 'Committees' covers the different types of meetings consultants attend, their purposes and relationship to other committees, chairing, participating as a member and common group processes. Bion (1961) and Menzies (1970) provide useful reading material.

'Mapping a System' is an exercise to identify the people, organisational structures and interpersonal processes that impinge on any named person or group (Reder & Israelstam, 1988). A random consultant job description is analysed in order to map the system which that appointee would be joining. We ask: 'what is the basic organisational information necessary about any consultant post?' (unit of management, support team, secretary, accommodation, current budget, etc.). We then ask ourselves: 'who seem to be the most influential members of that appointee's professional network?', 'what factors in the history of that service, as reported in the job description, are likely to have influenced other people's expectations of the appointee?', 'what changes seem likely?', 'what opportunities may arise?' and 'what constraints?'. Such a scheme becomes of practical use when the senior registrar applies for a consultant post for real (Reder & Duncan, 1990).

On-going supervision

Regular consultant supervision allows management issues to be discussed as and when they arise. Arrangements are made for the senior registrar to attend a number of committees as observer – for example, an Area Child Protection Committee, a Joint Planning Team, a Unit Medical Committee, a Care Group Policy Board and a Trust Clinical Advisory Group – with the brief to note organisational matters discussed and also to monitor the group process and how the chairperson manages it. The Centre's team meetings are similarly reviewed, especially when the senior registrar has chaired it, and this allows a broader discussion about multidisciplinary team functioning and beliefs about power (Dell, 1989).

Exposure to on-going management issues occurs by the consultant continually passing letters, reports, documents and draft responses to the trainee, to be discussed in supervision. For example, the process of applying for an additional senior registrar post allowed us to consider the manpower, finance and educational requirements (Morrell & Roberts, 1992), identify the roles of the Regional Adviser, the Joint Committee on Higher Psychiatric Training and the

Joint Planning Advisory Committee, and then draft a job description.

It is important to emphasise through all such discussions that we are trying to identify people's roles and the part they play in the NHS structures, and not discuss colleagues in a personal or unprofessional way.

Personal management

Trainees can also be helped to anticipate life as a consultant by rehearsing personal management strategies. Management of time is crucial and we review the senior registrar's timetable to ensure that clinical experience is maximised while preserving research and academic time. The wealth of training experience available means that priorities and economies must be decided. The team models respecting other people's timetables by starting and stopping all its meetings punctually. The team also models what it considers the second essential aspect of personal management – looking after yourself. Over-involvement in one's work can be as dangerous as errors of omission (Dale *et al*, 1986) and trainees are expected to monitor their work load, balance it with the needs of the service, take an appropriate lunch break and join the team at its once-a-term whole-day training workshop.

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