By choice, not by chance | 12 months on

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Overview

Higher education, medical education and general practice continue to face uncertainty. Students, as a result, are under significant pressure, which in turn shapes their experiences and expectations. It is imperative that the College better understands the needs, interests and experiences of all medical students, to better attract, engage and educate our future workforce.

Alongside many other factors, the RCGP can influence students' perceptions of general practice. The College has a responsibility to make sure it becomes a positive influence, one that provides beneficial support, guidance and resource to those considering a career in general practice. The College must ensure that students are supported to make informed career decisions having gained positive general practice exposure. We must provide students with an accurate and informed picture of the current and future general practice landscape.

In conjunction with the publication of 'By choice, not by chance', the RCGP created its first Student Engagement Strategy which aimed to govern the College’s pursuit to inspire tomorrow’s GPs, whilst providing support and guidance for its members wishing to engage with pupils, students and foundation doctors. The following themes were identified as part of the strategy:

- Nurturing positive student attitudes, behaviours and perceptions towards general practice
- Providing engaging and informative careers advice and guidance
- Supporting and empowering student-led activity
- Enhancing access and exposure to general practice

As part of the College’s response to 'By choice, not by chance', the following strategic themes were aligned with the most appropriate recommendations from the report. This paper lists both the College's strategic themes, the relevant recommendations from the report and the College’s efforts to date.

In completing this exercise and reflecting on our work of the past 12 months, we are taking an opportunity to review the purpose and progress of our Student Engagement Strategy. We aim to encompass the work the College does to engage those before and after medical school, whilst also incorporating the findings and recommendations from our recent report into students’ experiences and perceptions of general practice. In doing so the College’s programme of activity to inspire tomorrow’s GPs, now known as Discover General Practice, will continue to evolve over the coming year. The RCGP would like to thank all those that have supported the work listed in this paper, we’re incredibly grateful for the timeless time, effort and enthusiasm of our members.
1. Nurturing positive student attitudes, behaviours and perceptions towards general practice

Positively shaping students’ perceptions towards general practice

Recommendation 9
Positive and enthusiastic General Practitioner role models should be identified and made visible across all medical schools. This includes enhancing and supporting the role of General Practitioner Specialist trainees (GPSTs) as educators and assessors and interaction in primary care between medical students and near peers in training.

1.1 RCGP has supported and further developed a pilot mentorship scheme within its Severn Faculty, designed to help students and foundation doctors who are interested in a career in general practice by providing them with:

- Access and exposure to enthusiastic role models
- Accurate and informative careers advice and guidance

The scheme is seen to benefit both the mentor and the mentee - GPs feel energised and inspired by their positive interactions with medical students and foundation doctors. In doing so, we have begun to instil a culture of ‘paying it forward’ amongst our members. The scheme is currently being explored in both London and Northern Ireland.

RCGP has facilitated many speed mentoring sessions over the past 12 months, a format which has proven to be a great success. Students are given an opportunity to informally ask questions to a wide range trainees and qualified GPs.

Recommendation 11
Work should take place to tackle undermining of general practice as a career across all medical school settings including primary care. This should include (1) incorporating “undermining” into Faculty development (2) teaching students about the hidden curriculum (3) developing student self-assertiveness to question denigration (4) improved feedback mechanisms to enable students to report safely on any serious undermining whilst on placement (5) work with the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (AoMRC) to create a positive culture of professional respect.
1.2 RCGP and Medical Schools Council (MSC) commissioned Shift Learning, an independent market research agency specialising in the education and learning sector, to assist with the construction, delivery and analysis of a UK-wide survey to provide greater insight into students’ attitudes and perceptions towards a career in general practice and to identify factors that influence such perceptions.

1.2.1 The report builds on previous evidence demonstrating significant ongoing, widespread denigration of general practice; that there is no one simple solution to this and that it stems from a variety of sources. A comprehensive shift in discourse is needed across the entirety of the healthcare sector, alongside the promotion of professionalism and respect between areas of medicine, to prevent denigration between all specialities.

1.2.2 RCGP and MSC will use the evidence from this survey to help drive forward its recommendations; showing medical students that being a GP is a dynamic and rewarding career and preventing future students from being exposed to denigration of general practice. This data should also support a wide range of medical professionals and organisations to action positive change amongst their healthcare workforce and subsequently in all medical environments.
2. Providing engaging and informative careers advice and guidance

Allowing students to discover the endless opportunities a career in general practice can offer

Recommendation 2
Develop, promote and disseminate positive, realistic awareness and understanding of general practice to pupils in primary and secondary education.
Areas of focus must include:
• Medical schools outreach and widening participation activities
• Fora to provide interaction between school/college pupils and staff

2.1 RCGP has appointed a Schools Liaison & Outreach Officer to develop and deliver a range of activities and resources that promote awareness of general practice as a career to primary, secondary and sixth form school pupils.

2.2 Our newly created Discover GP activity aims to prepare and inspire tomorrow’s doctors. Activity allows pupils to learn, discuss and discover the role and responsibilities of a GP whilst exploring a variety of health conditions and methods of health promotion. Many medical schools have expressed an interest to support the delivery of such activity.

2.2.1 Our activity supports the national curriculum and aims to enable pupils to:
• Focus on successful teamwork and collaboration
• Maintain motivation to see a task through to the end
• Use creativity and imagination to solve challenges
• Develop their communication and presentation skills
• Develop their knowledge and understanding of general practice
• Develop their knowledge and understanding of a variety health conditions
• Develop their self-awareness, resilience and sense of wellbeing
• Develop their sense of place and pride in where they live
2.2.2 A typical session addresses the following:
- The different types of doctor
- What doctors do
- Different types of GP
- What do GPs do
- What makes a good doctor

2.3 RCGP is currently creating guidance for members who wish to or are currently engaging school pupils. The documents entitled “How to... Engage Schools” will be made available by the end of the year. It contains useful information for members that wish to promote general practice amongst schools and sixth form colleges.

2.3.1 RCGP members continue to support the College’s careers activity, attending all careers fairs where possible and guidance is currently being created for those at volunteer. We’re incredibly grateful for our members’ time and help.

2.3.2 A stakeholder group has been created to shape the College’s school’s engagement and outreach activity. The group consists of a variety of stakeholders who have experience and expertise in engaging school pupils, including schools, medical schools, members and CCGs.

2.4 RCGP has joined forces with MSC to deliver a student competition which aims to widen participation and enthuse the next generation of GPs. Medical students can play a vital role in widening participation and we know that young people love to hear from students as near-peers who have vital recent experience. Medical students have an opportunity to create vibrant and engaging outreach sessions and activities that will:
- Provide skills to help school students in their application to medicine
- Promote the exciting opportunities offered by a career in general practice

As part of the competition, sessions and activities should emphasise GPs’ ability to diagnose a wide range of complex conditions, quickly and compassionately, and how GPs work in teams with many other health professions. The best entries will be collated and form the creation of a tool that will be made available to schools, members, medical schools and GP Societies alike to deliver.
2.5 In December 2016, the RCGP’s Student Engagement team piloted an outreach event for secondary school and sixth form pupils, entitled Christmas at the RCGP - A festive journey through general practice. The event saw 60 pupils between the ages of 14-17, from 3 London-based schools attend; Ilford County Sixth Form, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Holloway School, Islington.

The morning’s session saw a wide variety of activities take place, from an immersive experience that transported pupils to the 19th Century, the present day, and into the future, where they could witness how the role of a GP has evolved (and will continue to evolve) over time, through the medium of drama. The performance was brought to life by 3 College members, who portrayed GPs from the 19th Century, 2016 and 2066.

Pupils dug deep into the general practice archives to explore and discover historical medical equipment before having an opportunity to sit down with both medical students and qualified GPs to talk about life at medical school and the day-to-day role of a GP.

The event was incredibly well received and as a result 98% of pupils stated they knew more about general practice, 88% were interested in studying medicine at university and for 58% - a potential career in general practice appealed to them.
Recommendation 6
The formal curriculum must better inform medical students on NHS management and delivery at the primary - secondary care interface. Students should recognise the breadth and complexity of general practice care and be stimulated by the complex intellectual challenge. The business elements of, and career options within, general practice (e.g. partnership versus salaried or locum roles) need to be clear to students.

Recommendation 14
Increasing the awareness of and supporting portfolio careers within general practice alongside the core role of a General Practitioner is crucial. Strong collaboration across all organisations is needed to ensure the range of opportunities within general practice is actively promoted within medical schools and students are offered a far better understanding of what being a General Practitioner can offer.

Recommendation 15
Promotion of GP careers should be carefully considered to ensure that students have the ability and flexibility to make informed career decisions without feeling pressured by market forces: (1) Information provided should be honest, accurate and accessible (2) Existing General Practitioners should champion the vision of the profession as an exciting intellectually challenging and rewarding career.

2.6 To best promote a career in general practice we must consider the current perceptions, understanding and aspirations of our target audience. Having carried out surveys, focus groups and behavioural insights activity we been able to identify areas that students value most when considering their future career, common associations made in relation to general practice and student’s greatest fears when considering a career in general practice, alongside the most commonly asked questions we receive.

Key themes have arisen and have informed the following unique selling points (USPs) which we are currently piloting when promoting a career in general practice. These aim to counter misperception and target factors most valued by our target audience. We wish to explore the use of these USPs in our upcoming promotional material and activity:

- Endless opportunities
- Intellectually stimulating
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Innovation and leadership
- Advocating patients
2.6.1 As part of the RCGP website development and content audit, measures are currently being put in place to create a discover general practice section, which will house the information and content listed below. These developments are due for completion in March 2018.

Discover general practice
- About general practice
- Why choose general practice?
  - Career options for GPs
- Routes into general practice
  - Pupils, students and foundation doctors
  - Overseas doctors
  - Other medical professionals

Coupled with a designated student hub, containing the following:

Student Hub
- Explore general practice
  - Blogs, testimonials, videos
- Experience general practice
  - Work experience
  - UG Placements
  - Electives
  - Taster Days
  - FY2 Rotations
- GP Societies
  - Find your local GP Society
  - Society Partnership Scheme
- Student Projects Group
  - Who are we?
  - What are we working on?
  - Get involved
- Upcoming events
- Student membership
2.7 In August, the College hosted **GP Question Time**, an event specifically for medical students and foundation doctors considering a career in general practice. A stellar panel, including Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard, Professor David Haslam, Professor Simon Gregory, Professor Nick Harding and Dr Duncan Shrewsbury fielded questions from both the floor and online. The discussion was streamed live on Facebook and received more than 1200 views during the live broadcast.

Attendees not only travelled from medical and foundation schools in London but also Birmingham, Exeter, Leicester and Ireland for the event. With 80% of attendees providing feedback, all either agreed or strongly agreed with the following:

- The RCGP should do more of these events.
- This event has positively influenced my perceptions of general practice.

Some of the written feedback included:

- “Thank you for an inspirational evening.”
- “Do this again! Really inspiring.”
- “Excellent event, would recommend it to anyone thinking about a career in GP.”

Recommendation 13
All institutions influencing students should collaborate to raise the profile of academic general practice by ensuring (1) all students have access to, and are overtly valued and rewarded, for scholarly activity and visible supervised by primary care leads (2) the profile of senior academic GP leaders in raised and appropriately acknowledged in all medical schools (3) collaboration between RCGP and SAPC is strengthened.

2.8 The **RCGPLEarning Research Ready®** course has now been made available to RCGP student members with access to a series of study modules to enhance research skills. The topics covered are:

- Becoming research ready
- Information governance and data quality
- Obtaining informed consent
- Assessing the feasibility of taking on and setting up a research study

2.8.1 For the first time a Student & Foundation Doctor Scientific Poster Competition took place at RCGP Annual Conference 2017.
Recommendation 10
RCGP should evaluate fully the role of GP Societies, to optimise these societies and share good practice. General Practitioners need to be present at student career fairs. RCGP should work more closely with SAPC to link into medical schools.

2.9 RCGP and SAPC are due to write to all medical schools to encourage them to have a dedicated curriculum and supporting resources for general practice as part of their undergraduate medical degree programmes. A guidance document to support this ask is currently being developed by both organisations.

2.9.1 SAPC continue to have representation upon the RCGP Specialty Advisory Committee, RCGP Professional Training Programme Board and RCGP Council.
3. Supporting and empowering student-led activity

Empowering students to celebrate and champion general practice, through the medium of their GP Society and in all peer-to-peer interactions

Recommendation 10
RCGP should evaluate fully the role of GP Societies, to optimise these societies and share good practice. General Practitioners need to be present at student career fairs. RCGP should work more closely with SAPC to link into medical schools.

3.1 RCGP undertook measures to evaluate the worth and impact of student-led GP Societies, including an exercise to evaluate our RCGP Student-led Conferences. Two short questionnaires were devised to assess their impact. Questions focused on how likely the student was to pursue a career in general practice and the words students associated with the profession. One was completed before the conference began, the second was completed at the end of the day. Individual’s responses were paired and analysed to assess the perception-change having attended the event.

- Of the 215 who completed both pre- and post-conference questionnaires, 78.5% were female.
- Students were more likely to say that general practice was their first choice or in their top 3 career choices after attending a student-led conference.
- Overall, 64.5% of participants said that attending the conference had changed their perception of GP, although many who said the conference did not alter their perceptions of GP highlighted that the day had cemented a previously positive perception of general practice.
- Changes in likelihood varied between regional conferences.
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<th>Before</th>
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<td>73.2% of students said they viewed general practice either first choice or in their top 3 options</td>
<td>80.9% of students said they viewed general practice either first choice or in their top 3 options</td>
<td>“It’s helped me confirm that I’d like to be a GP”</td>
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<td>64.5% of students said that attending a conference had change their perceptions of general practice</td>
<td>78.7% of students said that attending the South West Student Conference had change their perceptions of general practice</td>
<td>“[General Practice] it’s much broader than I thought it was, with lots of opportunities”</td>
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**Words before**
Coughs and colds
Stressful
Repetitive

**Words after**
Exciting
Interesting
Academically stimulating
Varied

“Made being a GP much more exciting and appealing”
“It has challenged me to make sure that my future career aligns with my core values. It has made me more optimistic about the future of general practice”
“Completely opened my eyes to the variety of career options open to GPs - very exciting!”
3.2 We also asked students as part of our Destination GP survey the impact of their interactions with GP Societies and 41% (n3680) of respondents said that GP Societies had a positive influence on their interest and perception of general practice, with only 6% reporting a negative impact.

3.3 RCGP has appointed a Student Projects Officer to promote awareness of general practice as a career, and College membership, to medical school students and foundation doctors to support the RCGP Student Engagement Strategy, and student member experience.

3.4 RCGP introduced the Society Partnership Scheme; inviting GP Societies of all shapes and sizes to become formally affiliated with the College. The Society Partnership Scheme aims to strengthen the RCGP’s relationship with all GP Societies across the UK, aiding their growth and development through enhanced exposure to the profession and its role models. To date we have 29 active GP Societies across the UK.

Dedicated support, resource and expertise is provided as part of the scheme. It is designed to allow GP Societies, and their members, to become advocates for general practice and to experience the endless possibilities that a career as a GP can offer. We hope that our Society Partnership Scheme will allow GP Societies, and their members, to have an even more effective role in shaping the future of general practice. To date 17 GP Societies have been granted affiliation with the RCGP as part of the Society Partnership Scheme, with an additional 4 applications pending. Alongside the Society Partnership Scheme the RCGP Student Projects Group has been established.

3.5 In Practice, the RCGP’s newly created student and FY member monthly newsletters aim to showcase the endless possibilities general practice can offer. More importantly, however, it will provide students and foundation doctors with an opportunity to share their experiences as well as contribute to and access guest blogs, articles and content.

3.6 Five RCGP Student-led Conferences were delivered in Spring 2017:

- South West & Wales: Bristol
- Scotland: Glasgow
- Midlands: Warwick
- North West: Liverpool
- Yorkshire: HYMS
3.7 The Perry Harrison Lecture Series aims to inspire medical students and foundation doctors to pursue a career in general practice, by providing local role models with a passion for the profession. The event series aims to:

- Provide exposure to significant local and national role models for those considering a career in general practice
- Enhance knowledge and understanding of a career in general practice
- Enhance attitudes and perceptions in relation to a career in general practice
- Provide significant benefit/prestige for members - we hope the College’s most engaged and knowledgeable members will put themselves forward to speak to students, foundation doctors and GP Societies.

The lecture series will take place at least once a year in each of the four devolved nations. In regions where there are more than one medical school, GP Societies may bid to host these lectures or, with permission of the speaker, events may take place at more than one university. In these instances, funding and equipment will also be available for other GP Societies to hold simultaneous events on their campuses where the talks can be streamed online.

3.8 For the first time, the 2017 RCGP Annual Conference saw a dedicated set of sessions for pupils, students and FY doctors, known as the Inspiring the Future stream. RCGPAC also offered a student volunteering programme for the first time alongside opportunities for students to interview senior College figures, most notably Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard.

**Discover GP: 16+**
60 sixth form pupils from Liverpool attended a dedicated outreach session at RCGPAC. They had an opportunity to meet individuals from all stages of the career pathway; learn more about the role of a GP and a career in general practice, whilst receiving hints and tips for applying to medical school.

**RCGP Inspiring the Future Awards & Celebration**
Our inaugural Inspiring the Future Awards & Celebration aimed to showcase the exemplary student/FY engagement work undertaken by medical students, foundation doctors and members of RCGP. A list of all award winners can be found [here](#).
4. Enhancing access and exposure to general practice

Providing accessible and meaningful opportunities to experience general practice

Recommendation 3
Improve access to and quality of work experience in general practice for prospective medical students. Work to achieve this should be collaborative and include:

- Sharing and co-promotion of existing materials, toolkits and models
- Practices to be encouraged to provide work experience opportunities

4.1 Using the University of Leeds model cited as good practice in 'By choice, not by chance', and more recently by the College, Health Education England were approached for funding to support a national pilot programme. A £30,000 grant was awarded in March to roll out this model across England. The terms of the grant were to provide payment of £150 to 200 practices in return for a 3-day placement in general practice with supportive workshops provided by medical schools pre- and post-placement.

A call for expressions of interest went to all members of the Medical Schools Council Selection Alliance (MSCSA) Reference Group and to all individuals who had previously expressed interest in this model. Funding was allocated to all interested parties in agreement to:

- Provide a clear record of reporting and expenditure
- Use the materials provided to support the project (including placement packs, participant packs and workshop materials)
- Participate in the evaluative research aspects of the project

To date, 15 partner universities have provided more than 360 placements. The pilot project findings will be reported in late November but early data demonstrates that the benefit to participants is clear, there are still barriers within institutions around the delivery that could be overcome with centralised oversight. RCGP intends to further develop the project having evaluated the impact of the pilot, we intend to explore the following areas of development; digital infrastructure, practice recognition, resource development and staff resource.