

Workplace-based Learning and ePortfolio Use in Post-graduate Medical Education in Flanders (Belgium): What Are The Perceived Needs?

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Background

Workplace-based learning (WBL) is crucial within post-graduate medical education (PGME), as learning is embedded in clinical work. The focus has increasingly been put on acquiring predefined competencies. It is therefore no longer deemed sufficient to simply be exposed to clinical practice for a fixed amount of time. To timely achieve these competencies, working conditions within WBL and learning experiences need to be fully optimised. Self-directed learning (SDL) is a prerequisite to fully benefit from learning experiences. Research has shown that the development of SDL skills can be facilitated with an ePortfolio. However, current conditions for workplace learning and ePortfolios are not always adapted to the learner-centred approach of SDL.

Objective

The aim of the present study is to explore the perceptions of both supervisors and residents about current WBL conditions and ePortfolio use in hospital-based PGME in Flanders, with the objective to develop a state-of-the-art ePortfolio supporting SDL.

Methods

Semi-structured focus group interviews with supervisors (n = 11) and residents (n = 33), from both surgical and medical PGME were conducted using the online format FocusGroupIT. A PDF file from each focus group was exported, and data were analysed in NVivo 12 using an inductive approach to thematic analysis.

Results

Predefined competencies were not always known nor met. The current ePortfolio was considered more an administrative burden than a support for WBL. The use and relevance of evaluation tools within this ePortfolio were perceived differently by supervisors and residents. Receiving and giving feedback was evaluated as not optimal, where supervisors and residents tended to blame each other for this. Residents indicated a need for more supervision and teaching. They frequently perceived an imbalance between autonomy and a safe learning environment. Time constraints were paramount. Residents frequently mentioned they missed learning opportunities because of the lack of structured time and attention for education in a busy hospital environment.

Conclusion

There are many opportunities to improve current WBL conditions. The current ePortfolio is not used to its full potential to support the SDL process. Further research should focus on exploring achievable interventions to optimise busy hospital environments for learning purposes, as well as optimisation of ePortfolios to truly support SDL.