

Paid employment for students in hospitals. Does it work?



Background

Many medical students balance study and time constraints of long placement hours with employment to meet their financial needs. Some medical students are employed by hospitals, which may provide bidirectional benefits to the student and the hospital. There is however little evidence of these benefits.

Aims and objectives

- To explore the experiences, perceptions and learnings of medical students who work in a hospital while studying medicine
- To explore hospital staff perspectives on the feasibility and acceptability of medical students undertaking paid employment in the hospital

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Results

Thematic analysis yielded four major themes:

- Workplace learning- casual work in a hospital as both a workplace and a place of opportunistic learning experiences.
- Work socialisation- casual work in a hospital instils a sense of familiarity with the clinical environment, providing a perspective on the inner workings of a hospital.
- Contributions- students contribute a unique skillset which can be utilised to optimise efficient hospital workflow.
- Barriers- constraints of the healthcare service and medical student which limit the employment opportunities available.

I've seen a lot of surgeries through it all. Just standing on the sidelines on my break... there's a lot of downtime where you're just, kind of, sitting and waiting for things to happen and that's when I've kind of taken the opportunity to go and do that- student

What you have been trained is really a doctor's perspective of life, but the hospital works in many different facets... there are multiple facets and you doing a role that is not a doctor role actually helps you understand the health system better- staff

I would see them as fairly competent if they were just about to finish their university degrees ...and they're young and they're usually quite savvy on computers – staff

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Discussion and conclusions

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The findings of this study suggest that medical students undertaking paid employment in the hospital does seem to work for both hospital staff and students.

- Experiences- students report a number of educational benefits afforded by casually working in a hospital
- Feasibility- while there are benefits employing medical students, hospitals may not have discretionary funds to support this on a large scale.
- Acceptability- hospital staff are supportive, suggesting multiple roles that medical students could fill ranging from administrative to patient services.

Conclusions

- Medical students are employed in a wide variety of roles in the hospital. Staff and students agree that this can lead to bidirectional benefits for the hospital and the student.
- Despite these potential benefits, a number of barriers to this exist including insufficient budget and inflexible university commitments.