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FLEXIBLE BY DESIGN. IMPLEMENTATION OF A FLEXIBLE ROTA PATTERN AND ITS IMPACT ON TRAINEE SATISFACTION AND WELLBEING

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Background

Trainee on-call commitments within Anaesthesia are usually integrated using longstanding fixed pattern rotas. Rotas are designed by humans, and therefore are within our remit to change. A more flexible approach to rotas may result in greater trainee satisfaction and wellbeing.

Problem

Fixed pattern rotas provide little flexibility to accommodate trainees lives outside of work. Accommodating life events like maternity or paternity leave, marriage and deaths, or even annual leave, can be difficult depending on the complexity of departmental rotas. Burdensome fixed rotas that have not evolved with the complexity of modern life may have contributed to poor trainee wellbeing, with burnout and attrition at an all-time high.

Strategy for change

Birmingham Children's Hospital (BCH) replaced a fixed pattern rota with a flexible design in 2021. Trainees are given the opportunity to select their on-calls across their placement following contact by the rota co-ordinator. Trainee requests are prioritised, weighing trainee requests and reasoning, with the required departmental cover.

Measure of improvement

In October 2022 a google forms survey was sent out via the Head of School to all specialty trainees within the West Midlands deanery, comparing the two approaches. The survey contained four questions, asking whether trainees had worked fixed rotas and the bespoke rota offered at BCH, and asking for their opinions comparing the two with regards to: 1) parental/care commitments 2) Major life events such as weddings 3) study leave 4) annual leave. Trainees were asked to provide free-text responses to the four categories.

We received 16 responses from a cohort of 25 (64% response rate), with 100% of those who responded having worked both types of rota. The free text responses demonstrated a clear preference for the BCH rota design vs fixed pattern rotas used at other institutions.

Lessons Learnt

The reasons for the preference had several themes:

1) Improved flexibility of the rota allowed for much easier planning of events occurring outside of work.

2) Greatly improved work-life balance.

3) Better opportunities to take study leave as most courses are booked several months before they happen.

4) Easier planning for parental and care commitments.

The responses received highlighted secondary effects of the BCH rota:

1) Increase trainee sense of agency over their training.

2) Improved morale.

3) Improved wellbeing.

Message for others

Modern life is complex, and rotas should evolve to accommodate the needs of trainees. Trying to find a greater balance with their jobs, training requirements, and their lives, has resulted in a rota that feels more collaborative, allowing trainees the free time they require more frequently. Actively showing trainees that their lives outside of work can be considered, results in an improvement on their overall wellbeing whilst at work and outside.