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The framework for general practitioners with a special interest in respiratory medicine

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Background:

The NHS plan proposes up to 1000 general practitioners with a special interest (GPwSIs) by 2004.^{1,2} Following a meeting organised by the General Practice Airways Group (GPIAG) Williams *et al*, in their discussion document³ outlined the possible roles of a GPwSI, using respiratory medicine as a model. A GPIAG working party then met up with the representatives of the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) and produced a draft working document which could give guidance to primary care organisations (PCOs) about the possible role of a GPwSI in respiratory medicine together with the core competencies needed to fulfil such a role. This stated that the role of a GPwSI in respiratory medicine is primarily one of leadership and service development (i.e. as a GP lead in respiratory medicine within a PCO).

This is contrast to other specialities such as ENT or dermatology where the GPwSI has a predominantly clinical role. In addition the draft document envisaged that the "gold standard" qualification for a GPwSI would be a Diploma in Respiratory Medicine.

The GPIAG draft document was modified after consultation with the British Thoracic Society, Royal College of Physicians, Royal College of Nursing, National Asthma Campaign, National Respiratory Training Centre and the Respiratory Education Training Centre and submitted to the RCGP. The resultant framework, published in this issue (pp38-41), is a chimera of a generic RCGP framework (for example, certain competencies such as negotiating skills will be common to all specialities) with the respiratory disease specific framework of the GPIAG draft document.

Key Features of the Framework.

1. The GPwSI is not a glorified clinical assistant, but should be a practising general primary care practitioner with a special expertise in respiratory medicine. Whilst the framework is intended for GPwSI's it could easily be adapted to a Nurse Specialist Role.
2. The key roles of a GPwSI are:
 - a) service development and leadership within a PCO.
 - b) offering intermediate clinical care in conjunction with local secondary care providers.
 - c) education of and liaising with other health professionals within a PCO on matters of respiratory medicine.
3. The focus of respiratory GPwSI activity is likely to be on asthma and COPD, but could well include other areas of respiratory disease such as allergy and infective diseases according to local needs and resources.
4. The GPwSI will have to demonstrate evidence of competencies as a generalist and specialist practitioner. This will probably include production of general and specialist professional portfolios. The GPIAG still believes that the future gold standard" should be an accredited Diploma qualification.

Comments

The GPwSI framework gives a broad framework for PCOs concerning the role and competencies required for a GPwSI in respiratory medicine. There needs to be clarification of the accreditation and mentoring process for GPwSI's together with a clearer definition of the specific areas of clinical knowledge and skills required by the respiratory specialist. The GPIAG education sub-committee is currently working on this and hopes to produce guidelines in the next few months.

The development of General Practitioners with a Special Interest by the Department of Health acknowledges the importance of the specialist skill and knowledge base within primary care, whilst also acknowledging the importance of maintaining generalist expertise. GPwSI's have the potential to improve the efficiency and quality of local respiratory services. Hopefully, PCOs will take this opportunity for health improvement and to reduce the substantial burden of respiratory disease on their doorsteps. ■

References

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3. Williams S, Ryan D, *et al*. General practitioners with a special clinical interest: a model for improving respiratory disease management. *British Journal of General Practice* 2002; **52**:838-43.

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