

Dr Sarah Rawlinson

SpR Anaesthetics

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals

Have you ever wondered what it is that motivates someone to apply for a job in the most hated hospital on the training rotation? Or why one hospital has lots of applications and another very few? Staff at one hospital in my region regularly wonder why female candidates don't apply for Consultant posts in their department. After several such speculative conversations in which I was involved I agreed to circulate a questionnaire to all recently appointed Consultants (within 5 years) and anaesthetic Specialist Registrars (SpRs) in the region. The aim of the survey was to try and establish what factors were important to SpRs when thinking about where they would like to work as Consultants, and to see if this was mirrored by the feelings of recently appointed Consultants. I was also interested to find out whether gender affected where any SpR might apply for a Consultant post.

12

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was anonymous and asked for general data such as gender, year of training or years as a Consultant and number of dependent children. SpRs were asked to rank 10 factors in the order of importance (10 highest, 1 lowest) as to how they felt they would affect their choice of hospital for a Consultant post. The Consultants were asked to rank the same 10 factors, recalling how they had affected their decision to apply for their current appointment. If the Consultants now felt the order of importance should change, after having been in post for a few years, they were given the opportunity to re-order the factors. There was space on the questionnaire for additional comments if either group felt an important factor wasn't listed. Finally, the Consultants were asked to rate their current job satisfaction giving reasons for their answer.

The factors for ranking that appeared on the questionnaire were:

Location of Consultant post / need for relocation

Partner's occupation / location

Access to dependents

School catchment area

Available job plan

Departmental culture / ethos

On call commitment / structure

Academic / research opportunities

Case mix / specialities offered

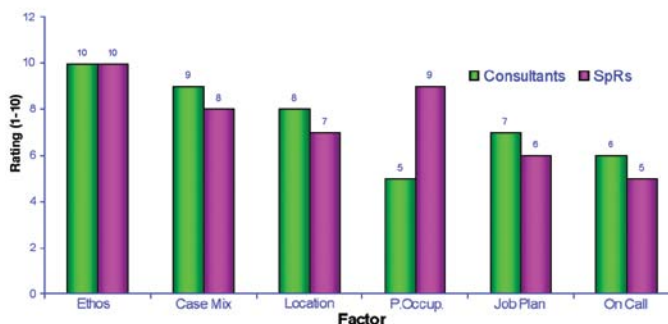
Private Practice

The Results

In total, 137 questionnaires were sent out with 64% (36) of consultants and 44% (36) of SpRs returning a completed form. Of the Consultants who replied 70% were male and 30% female; 78% had children. Most Consultants had been in post for 1-5yrs. The response from the SpRs was split equally, 50% male to female, and 74% had children at the time of the survey. A greater number of male SpRs had children. SpRs from all five years of training were represented among the returned questionnaires.

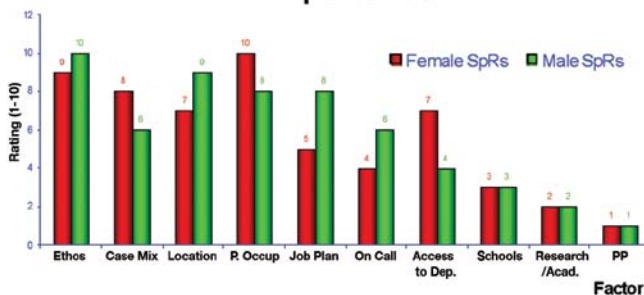
Both groups ranked the ethos of the department to which they would be applying as the most important factor to consider. The top six choices for each group are shown in figure 1. Five Consultants (14%) stated that they would alter the importance ranking of the factors after having taken up their Consultant post. Of those that made changes departmental ethos was ranked higher and available job plan was ranked lower. The two groups also agreed on the 4 least important factors. In descending order these were access to dependents, school catchment area, academic and research opportunities and lastly private practice.

Figure 1. Top Six Factors Affecting Job Choice



The main difference between the two groups was that Consultants placed a greater emphasis on case mix and specialities offered, whereas SpRs placed a greater emphasis on their partner's occupation and location. Figure 2 shows how male and female SpRs ranked the 10 factors. Female SpRs rank their partner's occupation/location as their first priority and also place a greater emphasis on access to their dependents when compared to the

Figure 2. Male vs Female SpR Order of Importance



What makes us choose where we work?

male SpRs. Factors related specifically to the job itself are ranked lower. Male SpR rankings are closer to that of the Consultants (predominantly male); however they too place a greater emphasis than the Consultants on their partner's situation, ranking this the 3rd most important factor.

Many respondents cited extra factors that they felt were important and that weren't listed. These comments are represented by the following statements:

Consultants	SpRs
Potential for skills development	Flexibility / development opportunity
Colleague encouragement	Forward thinking / modern department
Current Consultant opinion	Attitude of surgical colleagues
Department keen to appoint you	Timing of job advert
Enjoyment in the department as a trainee	Attitude received as a trainee
	Safety / sexism

Of the Consultants who returned their questionnaire 25(69%) commented on their current job satisfaction (figure 3). Of these 9(23%) were very satisfied and 23(65%) were satisfied with their current job. 3(9%) were indifferent and only 1(3%) was very unsatisfied.

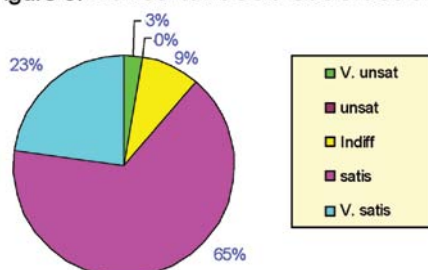
The reasons given for being unhappy with or indifferent to their job were as follows:

- "It takes years to get the job plan (NHS & PP) that you want"
- "Poor hospital senior management"
- "Loss of control/autonomy – no longer a professional, just a conveyor belt worker"

The comments made by the satisfied Consultants are represented by:

- "Good job plan and working relationship"
- "Full and varied job plan with a supportive team"
- "Attitude of the department, both trainees and staff"
- "Good department with colleagues that listen"
- "Professional satisfaction; Professional autonomy"
- "stability"

Figure 3. Consultant Job Satisfaction



Discussion

From this survey, working environment appears to be the most important overall factor affecting choice of workplace for a Consultant post. The ethos and culture of the department are also extremely influential in workplace choice and this is probably assessed when attached to the departments during training rotations. The ethos of the department is not just affected by Anaesthetic Consultant colleagues but by the secretarial support staff, theatre staff and surgical colleagues. Clearly a supportive department that is flexible and forward thinking with effective management is what people want. It seems that if you are happy in your work environment the specifics of any job plan can be developed and changed, and hence are seen as less important.

The SpR group in this survey clearly place greater emphasis on lifestyle issues than the Consultants currently do or report that they did at the time of their job application. This may reflect that the Consultant group had a greater proportion of males. A feature of Calman training is that SpR training is geographically static. Couples get settled in one area over 5 years of training and if one partner has already secured a job in the area the other must follow suit and is therefore restricted to a job that requires no relocation.

This survey has a number of strengths and weaknesses. The numbers involved are reasonably large and the response rate good for a postal questionnaire. However, we know that non-responders to questionnaires may differ in their attitudes and views which can skew results. The participants in this survey knew that the questionnaire, although anonymised, was being returned to a colleague and this may have biased the answers given. This may account for the low rating given to the importance of private practice and the more socially acceptable greater emphasis placed upon the partner's situation. The main purpose of the survey was to give an indication of and insight into what motivates us to apply for a particular Consultant post and I believe this was achieved.

So for any departments out there in need of attracting candidates, be careful how you treat your trainees as this is a proxy for departmental ethos! If relocation is likely to be required to undertake a Consultant post it is apparent that this will be unattractive to many candidates. However, a well thought out and attractive relocation package may help to entice the right person.

For all those trainees who are at the point of applying for that all-important Consultant post, give careful consideration to your potential future colleagues; anaesthetic, surgical and support staff. They will become part of your daily life for a very long time. They are less likely to change but your job plan and other factors can!

At the end of the day though, there will always be an element of that old adage **"right person, right time, right place"**