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Research Article

"Publish or Perish"-A pilot study into Dental Core Trainees experience in achieving publications

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Abstract

Introduction: Dental Core Trainees need to have publications on their CVs for career progression, particularly for specialty training. A pilot study was conducted within the HEENW DCTs to establish their perception and experience of gaining publications.

Method: Participants were invited by email to complete an anonymous survey.

Results: Seventy-six percent return rate showed 58% of respondents were intending to apply for specialty training; 66% would not seek publications if they were not necessary for career progression, letters and abstracts were the main accepted publications and 90% would like to see journals publishing more case reports.

Conclusions: Educational supervisors need to support DCTs with publications and journals could be encouraged to accept more case reports.

Keywords

1. DCTs have significant concerns regarding publications.
2. Lack of publications can prevent career progression.
3. Would dental journals consider a case report additional journal.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Introduction

All recently qualified Dentists are aware of the need to have publications on their CVs to facilitate their career choices, particularly if they wish to undertake academic or specialty training. The National Recruitment process is extremely competitive and the number and type of publications an applicant has is included in the scoring system used for shortlisting.¹ There are several potential difficulties for Dental Core Trainees (DCTs) that mitigate against them achieving publications to a reasonable standard. These include the short duration of placements proving a challenge for trainees to integrate within a department and identify and commence work on an idea they can present forward for consideration,² the lack of journals' willingness to publish case reports; and the requirement for support and supervision from senior colleagues. The consequences of these difficulties can lead to disillusionment and changes to individuals career choices which produces a "lost cohort" of future specialists. This pilot study is designed to consider the ramifications of the necessity for publications on the career choices of a cohort of DCTs.

Materials and Methods

An anonymous questionnaire was produced using "SurveyMonkey" and an email requesting participation was circulated to the cohort of DCTs within the North West region. The cohort included all three years of DCT training. The questionnaire comprised of 10 questions; 3 initial questions to gain insight into the individuals completing the survey and 7 questions to gain insight into their experiences of publications. A period of one month was allowed for responses. The questionnaire is shown in Figure 1.

Results

Sixty fully completed questionnaires were returned out of a target audience of 79 giving a return rate of 76%.

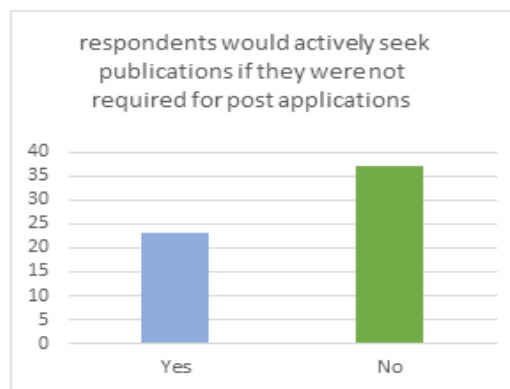
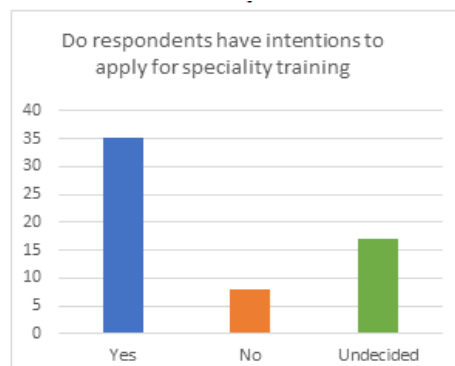
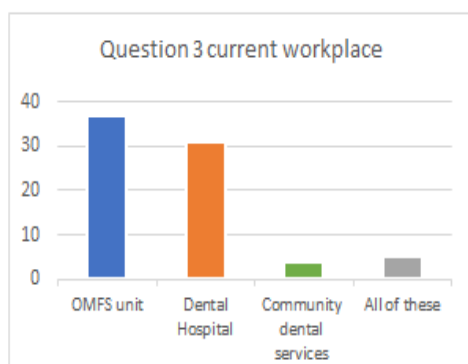
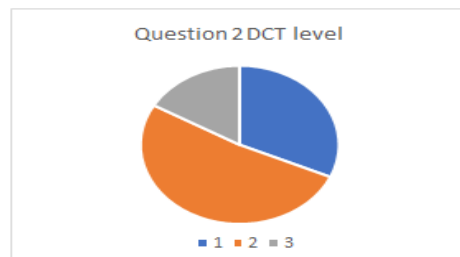
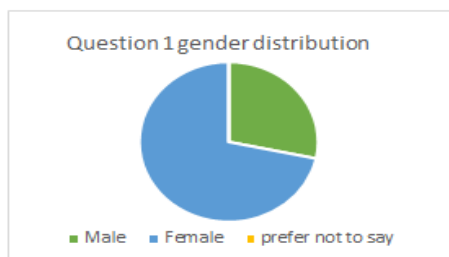
Questions 1-3 -demographic data

The 3 charts below show the demographics of the individuals that have completed the questionnaire. This shows that just over three quarters of respondents are female, more than half of respondents are at DCT2 level, and generally work either in an OMFS unit or Dental Hospital.

Question 4 -intention to apply for speciality training

Thirty-five DCTs (58.33%) definitely intended to apply for specialist training; 8 had no intention of doing so, but 17 remained currently undecided. Question 5 -would you seek to publish work if not required for post applications

Thirty-seven (61.66%) DCT respondents would not seek publications if they were not a requirement for future career progression.

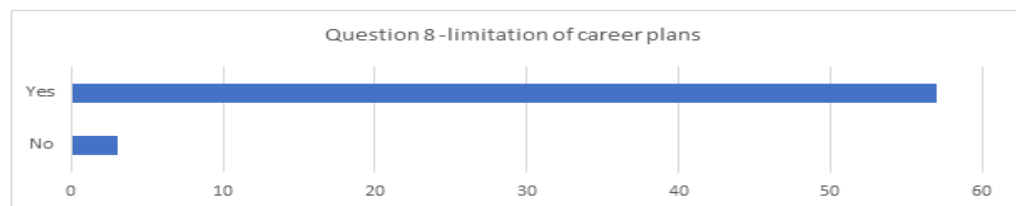
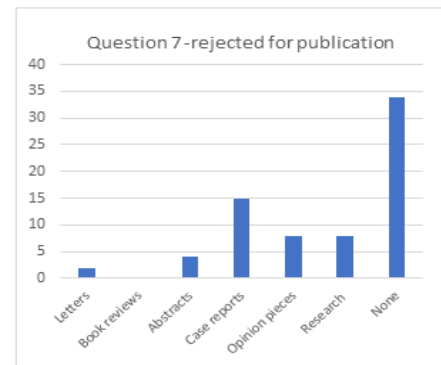
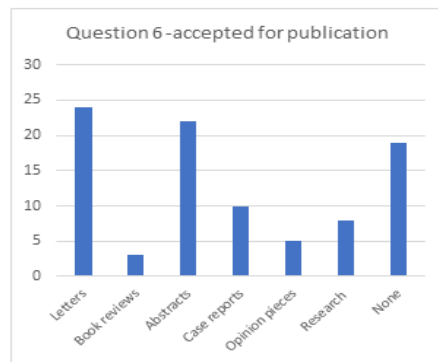


Questions 6 & 7 -types of submissions accepted and rejected

Nearly a third of individuals have not had any work accepted for publication and the most accepted piece of work for publication are letters. Abstract publications are to be expected, as DCTs often also submit posters and oral presentations to conferences, and abstracts are often included in the conference proceedings.

Question 8 -career plans limited by lack of publications

Fifty-seven (95%) of respondents believed that lack of publications will limit or restrict their career plans.

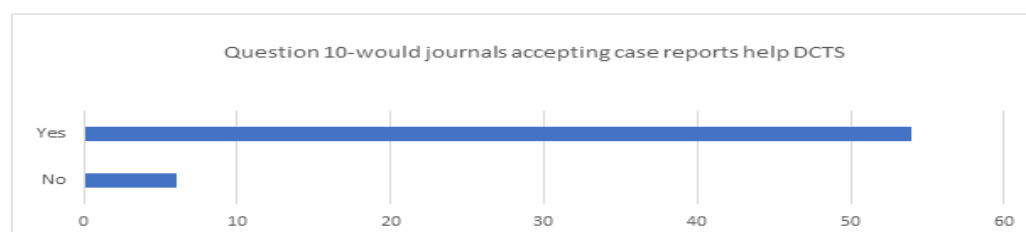
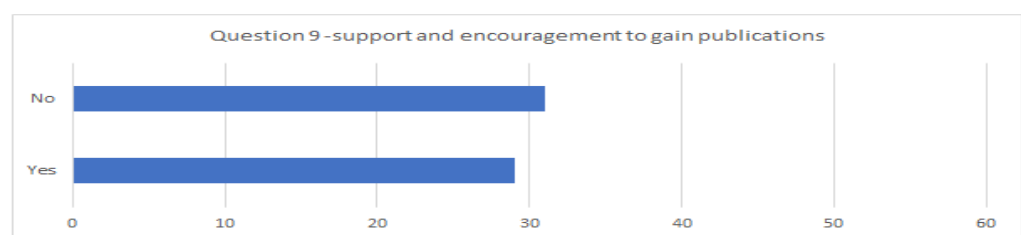


Question 9 -encouragement and support for publications

These results were almost equally divided with 31 respondents stating they had no help and support and 29 stating that they had help and support.

Question 10 -would journals accepting case reports help DCTs career plans

Fifty-four respondents (90%) felt that their career plans could be facilitated by journals accepting case reports.



Discussion

Across the North West of England, there are 79 Health Education North West DCT posts, at DCT1, DCT2 and DCT3 level.⁴ A total of 60 DCTs took part in this survey. The majority (71.67%, n=43) were female, and were at DCT2 level (51.67%, n=31).

The drive for publications is perceived to be intrinsic to career progression, rather than an individual desire to publish for personal reasons. Thirty-seven respondents (61.67%) stated they would not be interested in publications if they were not required for future post applications. The survey revealed that in the sample, 58.33% (n=35) of DCTs intended to apply for specialty training. The application process for specialty training is highly competitive, and publications are always taken into consideration during the selection process.⁵

DCTs tend to work in six or twelve month rotations and thus the short time that DCTs spend in their posts precludes the majority from having active involvement in research studies. They all undertake audits and service evaluations and may have publishable results, but the majority of these projects are more suitable as oral or poster style presentations at national conferences. As posters and oral presentations at conferences are published as abstracts this does "increase" publication numbers as shown by the 22 respondents in this survey. Letters would also seem to be a successful way of increasing publications as 24 had been accepted and only 2 had been rejected.

The majority of publications submitted within this cohort were case reports-25 were submitted of which 10 were accepted and 15 were rejected. Medical journals rarely publish case reports. This is thought to be due to the fact that case reports are often cited less than randomised control trials, which can result in reduction of a journal's impact factor.⁶ Many medical journals do not even accept submissions of case reports. There are a number of online open access journals which do accept case reports e.g. Journal of Medical Case Reports however these incur punitive article processing charges-a current example being "£825/\$1290 for each case report plus VAT or local taxes where applicable".⁷ This could result in "chequebook" career progression whereby DCTs with greater access to funds can achieve a greater number of publications than their peers and thus increase their selection chances for further training.

The survey revealed that 95% (n=57) of DCTs believe that lack of publications may limit their career plans and 90% (n=54) believe that it would help DCTs gain more publications if journals were more prepared to accept case reports. This is a potential area for further development, more medical and dental journals could be willing to support dentists and assist with the gaining of publications.

Support from colleagues in gaining publications was reported by approximately 50% of respondents-there is obviously scope for encouragement to Educational and Clinical supervisors to help DCTs to identify suitable projects to facilitate publications. HEE regions could also be encouraged to put on courses as part of the DCT programmes-for example Health Education North West is holding a study day entitled "How to get published" for 2nd and 3rd year DCTs.⁸ Perhaps there could be more workshops and seminars related to manuscript writing and gaining publications, as a way of supporting and encouraging DCTs.

Conclusion

This pilot study obviously highlights the stresses DCTs feel towards gaining publications and what impact this can have on their chosen career path. The current National Recruitment process places a great deal of emphasis on the "quantity" of publications an applicant has, and not necessarily the quality leading to DCTs competing to write letters and book reviews and internal competition within departments rather than a collegial working environment.

It is also clear that DCTs feel it would be beneficial if journals were more willing to publish case reports and it could be particularly beneficial if journals would consider either a specific "case report" section, or twice a year publishing a dedicated case report volume. The British Medical Journal now produces an additional specific "case report" journal so it would be beneficial for our young dentists to have a similar publication produced by dental journals. The authors would welcome the opportunity to conduct a larger study, possibly with the agreement of HEE, to identify ways of facilitating DCT publications as part of the training process and encouraging educational supervisors to support this. It is sad to think that many DCTs aspirations "perish" due to lack of publications when our current journals acceptance policies mitigate against them.

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Q1 Are you:

Male Female Do not wish say

Q2 What level DCT are you?

1 2 3

Q3 Which type of unit have your posts been mainly been based?

OMFS unit Dental Hospital CDS All of them

Q4 Are you intending to apply for specialist training?

Yes No Undecided

Q5 If publications were not required for further post applications would you still actively seek to be published?

Yes No

Q6 What type of publications have you had accepted?

Letters Book reviews Abstracts Case reports

Opinion pieces Research None

Q7 What type of publications have you had rejected?

Letters Book reviews Abstracts Case reports

Opinion pieces Research None

Q8 Do you feel that lack of publications may limit your career plans?

Yes No

Q9 Have you had active encouragement and support to help you gain a publication?

Yes No

Q10 Do you think it would help DCTs to gain publications if more journals were prepared to accept case reports?

Yes No