

Research Letter

Resident satisfaction with radiation oncology training

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Abstract

Purpose: Residency training environments can differ significantly; therefore, resident satisfaction may vary widely among programs. Here, we sought to examine several variables in program satisfaction through a survey of radiation oncology (RO) trainees in the United States.

Methods and materials: An anonymous, institutional review board-approved, internet-based survey was developed and distributed to U.S. residents in RO in September 2016. This email-based survey assessed program-specific factors with regard to workload, work-life balance, and education as well as resident-specific factors such as marital status and postgraduate year. Binomial multivariable regression assessed the correlations between these factors and the endpoint of resident-reported likelihood of selecting an alternative RO residency program if given the choice again.

Results: A total of 215 residents completed the required survey sections, representing 29.3% of U.S. RO residents. When asked whether residency allowed for an adequate balance between work and personal life, the majority of residents (75.6%) agreed or strongly agreed, but a minority (9.3%) did not feel that residency allowed for sufficient time for personal life. The majority of residents

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(69.7%) indicated that they would choose the same residency program again, but 12.2% would have made a different choice. Almost three-fourths of residents (73.0%) felt that faculty and staff cared about the educational success of residents, but 9.27% did not. Binomial multivariable regression revealed that senior residents (odds ratio: 6.70; 95% confidence interval, 2.20-22.4) were more likely to desire a different residency program. In contrast, residents who reported constructive feedback use by the residency program (odds ratio:0.22; 95% confidence interval, 0.06-0.91) were more satisfied with their program choice.

Conclusions: Most RO residents reported satisfaction with their choice of residency program, but seniors had higher rates of dissatisfaction. Possible interventions to improve professional satisfaction include incorporating constructive resident feedback to enhance the program. The potential impact of job market pressures on seniors should be further explored.

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Introduction

Residency programs differ in case diversity, resident autonomy, workload, service expectations, structure, supervision, and other factors that influence the educational experience. Recent publications¹⁻⁵ examined resident well-being, but literature on program satisfaction is limited,^{6,7} particularly in radiation oncology (RO).^{8,9} Information on the general work environment, call responsibilities, average workweek, and adequacy of ancillary support^{9,10} is valuable for medical students who are selecting a residency program⁷ and for institutions seeking benchmarks when evaluating their own programs. We sought to examine residency program satisfaction and work environment among U.S. RO trainees.

Methods and materials

In September 2016, after approval by the local institutional review board, all 88 U.S. RO program directors and coordinators listed in the Association of Residents in Radiation Oncology directory were emailed a request to distribute surveys to residents. The first 100 resident participants were given \$5 gift cards to incentivize participation. E-mail addresses were unlinked from responses for anonymity.

The online-based survey consisted of 9 demographic questions, 15 program-specific questions, and 22 burnout assessment questions. The full survey is available as a supplement. In this manuscript, we present the results pertaining to residency program work environment and satisfaction.

Binomial multivariable regression was used to determine which factors correlated with resident-program satisfaction. Satisfaction was measured by asking residents whether they would choose the same RO program again if given the opportunity. This variable was dichotomized for analysis (considered dissatisfaction if the response was “disagree” or “strongly disagree” and satisfaction if

the response was “neutral,” “agree,” or “strongly agree.” The results are reported as odds ratios (ORs) with 95% confidence intervals (CIs). All analyses utilized the R statistical software package version 3.3.1 (R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria).

Results

Overall, 232 residents responded to the survey, and 215 completed the residency program portion of the questionnaire and were analyzed, representing 29.3% of all RO residents nationwide in 2016. The survey results are shown in [Table 1](#).

Education

When asked whether residency allowed for an adequate balance between work and personal life, most residents (75.6%) agreed or strongly agreed. The majority (69.7%) felt that they would choose the same RO residency program again. Approximately three-quarters of residents (73.0%) felt that the faculty and staff cared about the educational success of residents, and more than half (57.7%) felt that their program used resident feedback constructively.

On-call duty

Residents most commonly reported having either 4 to 6 weeks (41.9%) or 7 to 9 weeks (39.5%) of call. During an average week of call, 43.3% of residents reported seeing 2 to 3 consults outside of their normal clinical responsibilities. Two-thirds reported for work at least 1 weekend day during a call week (69.7%). When residents were asked how many hours were spent at work in an average week, 1.9% reported ≤ 40 hours, 20.9% worked 41 to 50 hours, 47.9% worked 51 to 60 hours, 20.9% responded 61 to 70 hours, and 8.4% reported working ≥ 70 hours.

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