

Report on activities funded by the Phil Strong Memorial Prize 2013-14

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Tomorrow's Doctors and the undergraduate curriculum: a sociological perspective on regulation, practice and learning in a new medical school

Overview of the research

Background

Existing published sociological research on UK medical education (Atkinson 1997, Sinclair 1997) either predates *Tomorrow's Doctors*, the GMC's prescription for undergraduate medical education (General Medical 1993) or does not address its effects directly (Lempp and Seale 2004),(Brosnan 2010). This thesis examines how *Tomorrow's Doctors'* recommendations have been translated through the curriculum into practice in clinical placements in a new medical school.

Aims and objectives

To trace the developments along the metrological chain (Latour 2005) from *Tomorrow's Doctors* through the medical school curriculum to learning and teaching with patients in clinical placements.

- To analyse how the curriculum relates to *Tomorrow's Doctors*
- To study how the organisation of the curriculum impacts on practice through a focus on:
 - the effects of rotations and timetables on the learning process
 - the operation of the various systems of assessment
 - how students learn through interaction with patients and tutors

Methods

- Documentary analysis (Prior 2008) of *Tomorrow's Doctors*, course handbooks, and various aspects of the curriculum and assessment.
- Observation of patient-centered clinical placement in hospitals and primary care.

Progress to date

- Literature review of the sociology of medical education and an overview of the development of the sub-field of medical education research
- Exploration of relevant theoretical and methodological frameworks
- Analysis of key documents, a part of which resulted in the paper given at the Association for the Study of Medical Education (ASME) conference (abstract below)
- Analysis of the intended and unintended effects systems of regulation and assessment
- 30 hours of observation of teaching with patients in both primary and acute sectors

Activities supported

As proposed in the application, the prize was used to fund attendance at the following events and I ended my engagement with a paper given at the Association for the Study of Medical Education (ASME) annual scientific meeting (abstract below).

Date	Title	Venue
25th October 2013	Professionalism and Professional Identity	Austin Court, Cambridge Street, Birmingham.
20th November 2013	Researching Medical Education Conference	RIBA, London.
21 st November	Education research group	RIBA, London.
16th - 18th July 2014	Annual Scientific Meeting	The Brighton Centre, Kings Road, Brighton UK

Abstract: *Tomorrow's Doctors: from manifesto to manual – a 20 minute presentation to ASME Education Research Group Brighton, 17th July 2014*

Background and purpose

The first edition of *Tomorrow's Doctors* was a response to the variability in undergraduate medical education caused by a lack of explicitness and the 'uncoded' agreements of examiners (General Medical 1993). It was designed to 'to promote the development of a curriculum which corrects the existing faults of overload and didacticism' (1993 §19. p.6) seen as inimical to the educational opportunities essential for educating doctors capable of adjusting to change (1993 §23 p.7). Against the background of the shifts in the GMC's priorities over the last 2 decades, this paper will explore what (Timmermans and Epstein 2010) refer to as 'collateral damage' and the 'ironies of unintended consequences' (2010 p.84) that attend attempts at standardisation.

Methodology

Beginning with the Medical Act of 1983 and drawing on a sociological account of the GMC during the 1980s (Stacey 1992), Timmermans and Epstein's discussions of standardisation and an approach that asks what documents do rather than simply what they say (Prior 2008) the paper will offer an analysis of the three editions of *Tomorrow's Doctors* to trace the progression from what may be seen as a *manifesto* for a new framework in medical education in 1993, to a tool for its regulation, a *manual* in 2009. The paper will demonstrate how the need to transfer information from place to place categorises and shapes practices and standards and how the processes of inspection and evaluation deployed by the GMC in the regulation of medical schools have fed back into the standards that it applies.

Results

The paper will explore the consequences of some of the contradictions that have emerged from combining the GMC's rather liberal 1993 notion of education with an apprenticeship mode of training that Stacey states was never questioned by the council (1993, p. 113).

Discussion and conclusions

The paper will examine the causes and consequences of the early distinction between a core curriculum and what were then called student selected modules, tease out some the effects of the move away from disciplinary divisions towards synthesis, integration and body systems, and examine how these factors have interacted with one another. The paper offers a 'worked example' using methods drawn from new developments in sociology, providing an analysis that addresses how and why the educational vision expressed 21 years ago has been modified and a preliminary assessment of whether *Tomorrow's Doctors* has succeeded in encouraging the opportunities essential for educating doctors capable of adjusting to change.

References

- General Medical, C. (1993). *Tomorrow's doctors : recommendations on undergraduate medical education* issued by the Education Committee of the General Medical Council in pursuance of Section 5 of the Medical Act 1983, General Medical Council.
- Prior, L. (2008). "Repositioning Documents in Social Research." *Sociology* 42(5): 821-836.
- Stacey, M. (1992). *Regulating British medicine : the General Medical Council*. Chichester, Wiley.
- Timmermans, S. and S. Epstein (2010). "A World of Standards but not a Standard World: Toward a Sociology of Standards and Standardization*." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36(1): 69-89.

Enhancement of the study

The experiences funded by the prize will be used to flesh out the section in the thesis that deals with the sub-field of medical education, in particular its attempts to encourage theoretically informed research through

- Adding data from participation in ASME events to the analysis of the field of medical education research
- Delivering papers and receiving feedback from medical educators on the analysis of one of the documents central to the thesis (i.e. *Tomorrow's Doctors*)

References

- Atkinson, P. (1997). The clinical experience : the construction and reconstruction of medical reality. Aldershot, Ashgate.
- Brosnan, C. (2010). "Making sense of differences between medical schools through Bourdieu's concept of 'field'." *Medical Education* 44(7): 645-652.
- General Medical, C. (1993). Tomorrow's doctors : recommendations on undergraduate medical education issued by the Education Committee of the General Medical Council in pursuance of Section 5 of the Medical Act 1983, General Medical Council.
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- Lempp, H. and C. Seale (2004). "The Hidden Curriculum In Undergraduate Medical Education: Qualitative Study Of Medical Students' Perceptions Of Teaching." *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 329(7469): 770-773.
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- Sinclair, S. (1997). Making doctors : an institutional apprenticeship. Oxford ; New York, Berg.