Quality in Psychiatric Training

Development of a Resident Satisfaction Questionnaire

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The authors describe the development of an instrument to measure resident satisfaction with training, the Resident Satisfaction Questionnaire (RSQ). A national sample of 180 residents rated 41 items regarding the relative importance of each item in determining resident satisfaction with training. The five items rated most important in determining resident satisfaction with psychiatric training were 1) quality of supervision; 2) respect of faculty for residents; 3) responsiveness of the program to feedback from residents; 4) balance of training between psychosocial and biomedical aspects of psychiatry; and 5) departmental morale. Authors discuss differences among resident subgroups. The 10-item RSQ included items rated most important by the overall group of residents and by resident subgroups. Authors present recommendations for use of the questionnaire. (Academic Psychiatry 2000; 24: 41–46)

The American Association of Directors of Psychiatric Residency Training (AADPRT) Task Force on Quality in Residency Training previously published a general definition of quality as it applies to residency training (1). In short, that definition emphasizes outcomes relevant to the needs and reasonable expectations of “stakeholders” of training programs (e.g., residents, faculty, prospective residents, patients and families, funding agencies, and professional organizations). A report from the Task Force describing additional background to the present report has been accepted for publication (2).

The next step in the evolution of this view of quality in residency training was the development of outcome measures, of which stakeholder satisfaction is an important example. Because several reports have emphasized the influence of current resident satisfaction on the recruitment of future residents (3–5), and because no reliable, valid, and generally accepted resident satisfaction questionnaire was available, the Task Force undertook to develop a resident satisfaction questionnaire.

What determines resident satisfaction with a program? Skodol and Maxmen (6) surveyed 71 residents in four psychiatric training programs concerning professional role satisfaction, theoretical orientation, perceived technical competence, and need for supervision. Role satisfaction among residents increased during training and correlated with perceived competence and decreased need for supervision. Although this study did not directly address resident satisfaction with training, the inference is that the degree to which programs increase perceived competence should increase satisfaction with aspects of training programs related to residents’ acquisition of technical competence.

Haupt et al. (7) surveyed 31 residents for factors contributing to satisfaction with an idealized training program. The five most important factors related to resident satisfaction were 1) quality of attending teaching; 2) feeling of esprit de corps; 3) degree of responsibility for patient care; 4) quality and number of conferences; and 5) outpatient experience.
Several studies found the philosophy of the training program, especially the degree of eclecticism, to be important to applicants as a criterion for selecting a training program (8,9). Other surveys have considered factors important to resident applicants in choosing a program (see, for example, References 3 and 5). A number of factors extrinsic to the quality of the training program emerged, including geographic location, spousal satisfaction with the community, and opportunities for employment after graduation.

This report describes the process used by the task force to develop a measure of satisfaction for residents in training, a measure based on a large national sample of psychiatry residents. The Residency Satisfaction Questionnaire (RSQ) offers training directors a more reliable and valid instrument than most programs have the resources to develop independently, and it could be used to compare satisfaction data over time and across programs.

METHODS

A list of factors related to residents’ satisfaction with the quality of training programs was generated from a review of the literature cited above, resident focus groups, and training-director focus groups. Fifty psychiatric residency training directors listed factors they believed residents would consider most important in determining satisfaction with the quality of residency training. Residents (N = 15) in two training programs participated in similar focus groups. Although items generated by training directors and residents were very similar, care was taken to include items generated by one group even if they were not generated by the other. Items generated from the literature review and focus groups overlapped to such a degree that additional resident or training director focus groups were not thought to be necessary.

A total of 41 items from the literature review and focus groups comprised the initial survey given to residents to determine their perceptions regarding the quality of training programs (Table 1). Two “Other” items were included to encourage residents to add items not already listed.

Not included in the items submitted to residents were factors extrinsic to training programs (e.g., geographical location). Although such factors are of great importance to resident applicants, most of them are not under the control of the training program and would be of lesser value in helping programs to improve residents’ satisfaction with the quality of training.

The 41-item questionnaire was submitted to residents in 38 programs that had indicated a potential interest in participating in the development of the Resident Satisfaction Questionnaire. Because interest in participating was indicated only by signing a list circulated during the focus groups, a high degree of participation after the meeting ended was not anticipated. Sixteen programs returned questionnaires completed by their residents. A description of the 180 residents who completed the survey is shown in Table 2; the participants appear to be a fair representation of residents in training. Participating programs covered all geographic regions in the United States and one Canadian region.

Residents were instructed that the purpose of the survey was not to determine their current satisfaction with residency training. They were asked to indicate (on a 5-point Likert scale) the importance attached to each factor in determining their satisfaction with residency training (with 5 indicating a factor of great importance). Information regarding residents’ backgrounds, interests and orientations, and program descriptions were recorded (Table 2).

RESULTS

The following five items were considered most important by the overall group of resident respondents in determining residents’ satisfaction with training programs: 1) quality of supervision; 2) respect of faculty for residents; 3) responsiveness of the program to feedback from residents; 4) balance of training between psychosocial and biomedical aspects of psychiatry; and 5) morale in the department (Table 3).

The top five factors overall were also the five most important factors listed by American medical school graduates (AMGs; 107 responses). International medical school graduates (IMGs; 68 responses) included four of these as their most important factors: quality of supervision, respect of faculty for residents, responsiveness of the program to feedback from residents, and morale in department. Personal qualities of the program director were included among the five