

Foundation forum: developing leadership skills among foundation trainees

ABSTRACT

Foundation forums have been adopted over the last few years to provide representation for newly qualified doctors, but they do not develop essential leadership, management and quality improvement skills for those recruited – key attributes that have been formally identified by General Medical Council (2012) guidance. A foundation forum was set up across three Oxford deanery hospitals. Forum members were assigned classical forum roles, but were also tasked to complete quality improvement projects, organize a national quality improvement conference, and undergo formal leadership and management training. Members were surveyed before and after completion of training, revealing statistically significant increases in confidence in leadership, management and quality improvement skills. All members revealed an eagerness to continue formal leadership and management training. The foundation forum proved a successful initiative to improve overall trainee experience and involvement, while providing a platform for leadership and management training to satisfy key domains within the Medical Leadership Competency Framework.

In addition, the forum members were tasked to lead one quality improvement project, with support to completion from other forum members. The idea for each quality improvement project was conceived by the forum members at the initial meeting with the aim being to improve the overall trainee engagement and experience. The final role of the forum was to organize and deliver a national quality improvement project conference, thus providing a platform for trainees and undergraduates to take part in quality improvement and share their experiences.

The foundation forum aimed to provide trainees with the opportunity to improve their non-clinical skills. Members benefitted from the provision of a free formal management and leadership course. This targeted the 'demonstrating personal qualities' and 'working with others' domains of the Medical Leadership Competency Framework (Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, 2010).

The Medical Leadership Competency Framework was designed to enable and empower doctors in the NHS to be practitioners, partners and leaders. It describes five domains:

1. Demonstrating personal qualities
2. Working with others
3. Managing services
4. Improving services
5. Setting direction (Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, 2010).

Foundation forums have been adopted by NHS trusts in the UK over the last few years with the aim of providing representation for newly qualified doctors. These forums were designed to identify and address problems arising in the workplace, thus improving the overall learning environment for foundation trainees. However, these forums do not routinely empower their members to develop essential leadership and management skills. The 2012 General Medical Council guidelines on leadership and management stipulate that the responsibilities of a doctor should extend beyond being a good clinician. Among wider responsibilities, doctors should be involved in the planning, use and management of resources, as well as 'providing leadership and vision to the organisation', whether or not they are in a recognized formal management role (General Medical Council, 2012). In addition, the provision of training in quality improvement, management and leadership would enable future doctors to adapt to the needs of a changing health-care system (General Medical Council, 2018). The authors aimed to implement strategies to improve leadership, management and quality improvement skills among newly qualified doctors through means of the foundation forum.

What was done?

A foundation forum was set up in the Oxford deanery (Health Education England Thames Valley), based at Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust. This trust consists of three specific hospitals: Stoke Mandeville, Wycombe General and Amersham Hospitals. The forum was initially advertised during the foundation programme induction day and the application guidance was subsequently forwarded to the emails of all foundation doctors. Each applicant was required to answer the question: 'In no more than 400 words, please tell us about the skills you can offer the trainee forum'.

Applications were carefully scrutinised by a panel of foundation programme directors, and eight successful candidates were appointed as forum members; five of whom were foundation year 1 doctors and the remainder were in foundation year 2. Forum activity was chaired and supervised by the foundation training programme director.

Members' roles

Each forum member had specific 'classical' roles, including identifying themselves to trainees and enquiring about their individual experiences, representing the views of foundation doctors during quarterly meetings and working together to find solutions to any highlighted problems. In

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Table 1. Problems addressed within the foundation forum and the solutions implemented

Problems	Solutions
Exception reporting barriers, including lack of awareness of rights and fear surrounding reporting	Liaison with the Guardian of Safe Working Hours, guidance emailed to junior doctors and a brief talk delivered during foundation teaching
Poor access to senior support in certain specialties	Concerns were escalated to the clinical lead, which led to changes in escalation policies and responsibilities of senior registrars
Suboptimal handover procedure after night shifts	A standardized procedure was proposed requiring night staff to handover jobs and pertinent patients for day staff to be aware of
Unreliable IT systems and lack of single access logon	Liaison with IT, who developed and tested a new, integrated computer system
Lack of a doctors' mess	A suitable location within hospital grounds was identified and is currently being developed to serve as a new doctors mess

The latter three are aimed at clinicians after obtaining their certificate of completion of training. Specifically, within the demonstrating personal qualities domain, training targeted developing self-awareness, managing self, continuing personal development and acting with integrity. Within the working with others domain, the training targeted developing networks, building and maintaining relationships, encouraging contribution and working within teams.

Solving problems

The forum succeeded in finding solutions to all problems raised throughout the year (Table 1). Dealing with the issues surrounding exception reporting within the new junior doctor contract was a major achievement. The foundation forum acted as a vehicle for communication with the junior doctor cohort and, through liaison with the Guardian of Safe Working Hours, managed to overcome key barriers to exception reporting.

Other pertinent issues addressed included poor access to senior support in certain specialties, suboptimal handover procedure after night shifts, difficulty accessing patient data as a result of unreliable IT systems and inadequate facilities to serve as a doctors' mess. As part of the solution, the forum identified a suitable space to act as the new doctors' mess, the development of a new integrated IT system and standardized handover procedure post-night shifts. The forum was able to address all the problems raised during the year, as seen in Table 1.

In addition quality improvement projects were designed around using social media to improve training experience and designing a mentoring scheme to support trainees, by pairing them with senior clinicians in their chosen medical or surgical field.

Throughout the year, the forum encouraged and supported trainees in carrying out their own quality improvement projects. Members successfully organized and delivered a national conference that gave trainees and undergraduates a platform to present and distribute their quality improvement projects. Over fifty trainees

attended, starting with a keynote lecture by the Editor-in-Chief of *BMJ Open Quality*. Five oral presentations and over twenty poster presentations were scheduled, before ending with a workshop on 'forming a consensus policy on exception reporting' and 'difficult decisions in leadership'.

Outcomes

A survey was designed (Figure 1) to assess the overall effect of this initiative and paired *t*-tests were employed using GraphPad Prism software for data analysis. The overall survey response rate was 75%, with six out of the eight forum members surveyed. The survey was conducted pre-initiative and then repeated post-initiative. The survey revealed that foundation forum members gained significant confidence in management skills from 40% to 72% ($n=6$, $P<0.05$, confidence interval 18.4–45.6) and leadership skills from 44% to 70% ($n=6$, $P<0.05$, confidence interval 19.2–32.8), while self-perceived application of management and leadership skills improved from 46% to 84% ($n=6$, $P<0.05$, confidence interval 14.1–61.9) (Table 2). All foundation members surveyed revealed they are keen to continue formal management and leadership training with the aim to develop themselves as clinician-managers and clinician-leaders. All quantifiable questions reached statistical significance.

Figure 1. Survey design.

Please answer all questions by circling your answers to the following short survey. This will provide us feedback on the effectiveness of the foundation forum and help us develop it in the future.

- In your opinion, how confident are you with your overall **management skills**?
(0 – no confidence, 10 – extremely confident)
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- In your opinion, how confident are you with your overall **leadership skills**?
(0 – no confidence, 10 – extremely confident)
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- In your opinion, how confident are you with implementing **management and leadership skills** in clinical and non-clinical situations? (0 – no confidence, 10 – extremely confident)
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- In the future, would you continue formal management and leadership training, and why?
- Any other comments or suggestions?

Table 2. Pre- and post-initiative results in overall confidence in management and leadership skills and their application in clinical and non-clinical situations. All results reached statistical significance ($P < 0.05$)

	Confidence in management skills (%)	Confidence in leadership skills (%)	Confidence in management and leadership application (%)
Pre-initiative	40	44	46
Post-initiative	72	70	84

Limitations of this small study include that two members of the foundation forum were absent during pre- and post-data collection because of clinical duties and were excluded, which reduced the overall numbers sampled. A larger, multicentre survey may help to improve overall power and confirm the results of this initiative. Also, measuring outcomes of an educational intervention remains difficult (Schilling and Applegate, 2012). Although surveys are widely used, they focus only on the participants' perceptions of their skills. While a combined approach of using participant surveys and objective assessment measures would provide stronger evidence of intervention effect, objective measures remain difficult to implement in the context of leadership and management skills (Frich et al, 2015).

Conclusions

The foundation forum was a successful initiative to improve trainee experience and

involvement within the training process, while providing a means for foundation members to develop as clinician managers and leaders. Further multicentre surveys may help to enforce the role of formal management and leadership training within foundation forums and provide confirmation of these results. The principles established in this initiative may be extended to forums focusing on more senior trainees, aiming to develop high-level management and leadership competencies of the Medical Leadership Competencies Framework. **BJHM**

Conflict of interest: none.

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KEY POINTS

- There is an increasing requirement for trainees in the UK to develop and demonstrate their leadership and management skills throughout stages of their training.
- Foundation forums have continued to provide a safe platform for junior trainees to highlight concerns in the workplace.
- There is potential for foundation forums to be expanded, namely by providing formal management and leadership training and promoting the development and execution of quality improvement projects. This will enable trainees to build skills in management, leadership and quality improvement, satisfying General Medical Council (2012) guidance.

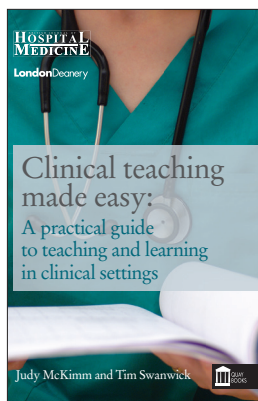
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