

SOLE- should it be made compulsory?

A paper by Natalie Kempston, Deputy President (Education)

Background:

The Faculty of Medicine is moving to make SOLE compulsory for its students (See Appendix 1 for the proposal). This was discussed at various Staff Student Liaison Groups where the reaction was positive from both staff and students. SOLE participation rates are hugely varied from department to department- with some departments having a very high turnout, while others struggling to get many students to fill it in.

Discussion Points:

Is it right that students could be punished for not filling in SOLE?

Should SOLE be made compulsory in other departments?

Appendix 1- Paper presented to Medical Studies Committee from FoM

There are a number of unique characteristics about SOLE in the School of Medicine. Surveys run more frequently, there are multiple teachers involved in every course and clinical placement and, as a result, thousands of reports are generated in each academic year. Furthermore, we perceive providing constructive and thoughtful feedback to be a professional responsibility that will form a significant feature of our students' careers as medical professionals.

SOLE has a critical role in helping us to understand the variation in quality of our clinical sites. Sites that perform well consistently are used as exemplars of good practice and where sites perform badly over a period of time, we use SOLE as a quality management device to drive up standards. We are also increasingly using SOLE data to place students at sites that provide the highest teaching quality, as student numbers in Medicine have begun to fall and we have the capacity to do so. Redistributing even small numbers of students has a very significant financial impact on our NHS partners. It is therefore essential that response rates are high so that data and decision-making are robust.

Response rates in Medicine have been in decline over the past 12–18 months and remain extremely poor despite concerted efforts on the part of the School to engage students. Students have been given teaching sessions on the importance of SOLE; we have run 'you said, we did' campaigns; reporting has been significantly improved and discussions have taken place at Staff Student Liaison Groups; the Medical Student Union has been asked to help raise participation; we have expanded the use of timetabled SOLE completion sessions and senior students can even access SOLE directly on their iPads. None of these interventions has been effective in raising participation.

We have recently received a letter from the Director of Education and Quality at Health Education North West London (HE NWL), the local education and training board, which is the commissioning body for undergraduate medical training. The letter highlights the critical importance of SOLE and HE NWL's need to correlate this with quality data collected from other trainees from the medical and allied health professions. It asks us to consider making SOLE compulsory for our students, as is the case at a number of other medical schools.

Having discussed widely with teachers and students, we have reached the conclusion that this is a position that we support and we would wish to introduce this change with effect from January 2014. The corollary of introducing a requirement to complete SOLE is that there must be a sanction for students who fail to do so. We do not wish to make this overly punitive and propose to introduce a sliding scale of consequences.

1. All students who fail to complete SOLE will be reminded to do so.
2. Students who ignore reminders and fail to complete a SOLE survey will be required to see their Head of Year who will issue a warning.
3. Students who fail to complete SOLE on more than one occasion will be required to meet the Head of the Undergraduate School. At their discretion, a range of penalties could be applied, from a remedial essay on professionalism through to obstruction to progression in the case of repeat offenders.

If approved, the School will run a communication campaign so that it does not come as a surprise to students. We will also continue to engage with them about the importance of SOLE and the action we take in response to their feedback.