



A person-practice-program fit

Evaluation of a GP training placement process

Caroline Laurence

MHSM, is Special Projects Manager, Adelaide To Outback GP Training Program, Adelaide, and Senior Research Fellow, Discipline of General Practice, University of Adelaide, South Australia. caroline.laurence@adelaide.edu.au

Linda E Black

BA(Psych), DipAppPsych, MAPs, is Chief Executive Officer, Adelaide to Outback GP Training Program, Adelaide, South Australia.

BACKGROUND

The placement of general practice registrars in vocational training practices can be a difficult process if both educational and organisational needs are to be met.

METHODS

A telephone survey of 22 registrars and 24 supervisors was conducted to evaluate the placement matching process used by the Adelaide To Outback (A2O) GP Training Program.

RESULTS

Overall, registrars and supervisors were satisfied with all components of the placement matching process. The majority of interviewees reported the interview component of the process as being a positive experience.

DISCUSSION

The evaluation has shown that the model developed by A2O is successful, allowing input by registrars and supervisors while remaining manageable for the training provider. It is also a transparent and equitable process for all involved and is flexible enough to meet different regional needs. A number of suggested areas for improvement can be integrated easily into the model.

In Australia,¹ the United Kingdom² and New Zealand,³ the primary location for learning about general practice at an undergraduate and vocational level is community general practice.⁴ General practice vocational training programs in these countries apply an 'apprenticeship model', with general practice registrars spending 1–3 years of their training in a general practice located in the community, under the guidance of an experienced general practitioner supervisor.

The matching of a registrar with a practice and supervisor is an educational and organisational issue. Educationally, the matching process should ensure the supervisor and teaching practice meet the learning needs and style of the registrar, with the supervisor providing regular, high quality education and feedback in a supportive environment with good facilities.⁵ At an organisational level, vocational training programs need to provide placements for a large number of registrars, maintain a regular supply of registrars to teaching practices, and incorporate flexibility and choice for both practices and registrars. The balance between educational and organisational issues is often difficult to achieve, and can be a source of dissatisfaction for participants.^{4,6}

The aim of this article is to describe the matching process developed and implemented by a general practice vocational training provider – the Adelaide To Outback (A2O) GP Training Program – and to report on registrar and supervisor satisfaction with the process.

Adelaide To Outback matching process

Adelaide To Outback is one of 21 regionally based providers of GP vocational training in Australia formed in 2002 following a move from a centralised training model.⁷ Adelaide To Outback is based in South Australia and provides training in both rural and urban settings by utilising a network of general practices throughout the region. Adelaide To Outback currently caters to over 80 registrars and has links to 40 accredited training practices. Registrars undertake three terms of 6–12 months in one or more of these practices during their training.

In 2002, A2O developed a five step process to improve the matching of registrars and practices (*Figure 1*). This process aimed to meet educational and management requirements, improve the allocation process for participants and ensure an optimal education experience.

First, representatives of each group and A2O staff developed a matching needs checklist for registrars

and supervisors. Examples of registrar needs include preferred type of practice, preference for full or part time training, special interests, preferred learning style, and training location. Supervisor needs might include a preference for type of registrar (rural or general), registrar training level, length of placement, and special interests of the practice.

The matching needs checklists are distributed to registrars and supervisors 6 weeks before the start of each allocation process and 3 months before the next placement. Practices and registrars are required to indicate their preferences by completing the matching needs checklist and returning the form to A2O within a set timeline (**Step 1**).

Adelaide To Outback staff then undertake a preliminary matching process based on each party's preferences, but also considering the training needs of the individual registrars, including any special considerations that have been identified (**Step 2**).

Each teaching practice and registrar is then provided with a minimum of two supervisor candidates. Interviews are held with both candidates to assist both parties in deciding their final preference order (**Step 3**).

Registrars and supervisors then independently forward their final preferences to A2O (**Step 4**), which then makes the final allocation and informs all parties of the placement outcomes (**Step 5**).

In circumstances where there are no viable options, alternative options are pursued.

Methods

Adelaide To Outback evaluated its matching process after three terms. A telephone survey was undertaken of all A2O registrars and supervisors who had participated in at least one matching process. A list of 10 questions covering all steps of the process was developed for registrars and supervisors. Two A2O staff members conducted the survey over 1 month.

A total of 22 registrars and 24 supervisors participated in the interviews; descriptive analysis of the data was undertaken using the SPSS statistical package.⁸

Results

Matching criteria and choices offered

The majority of registrars (72.2%) and supervisors (81.8%) felt that all necessary areas had been included in the matching needs checklist (*Table 1*). However, respondents suggested including areas such as on-call and after hours work at the practice, number of nursing home visits, courses completed by registrars, and more personal information such as registrar background and age.

The offer of only two choices was found to be less satisfactory. A few participants felt more choices would allow a better decision choice, albeit making for a more complex process.

Interview process

Supervisors and registrars were asked to describe the interview process undertaken before their last placement.

Usually the registrars met with the practice manager and supervisors. With a few exceptions, all these meetings were undertaken face-to-face, with varying degrees of formality (from a casual chat to a structured interview). Some practices included a tour of the facilities and community, and others requested a second visit with the registrars.

Almost all registrars (95%) and 77.8% of supervisors described the interview process as being a positive experience. It allowed registrars to get a feel for the practice and

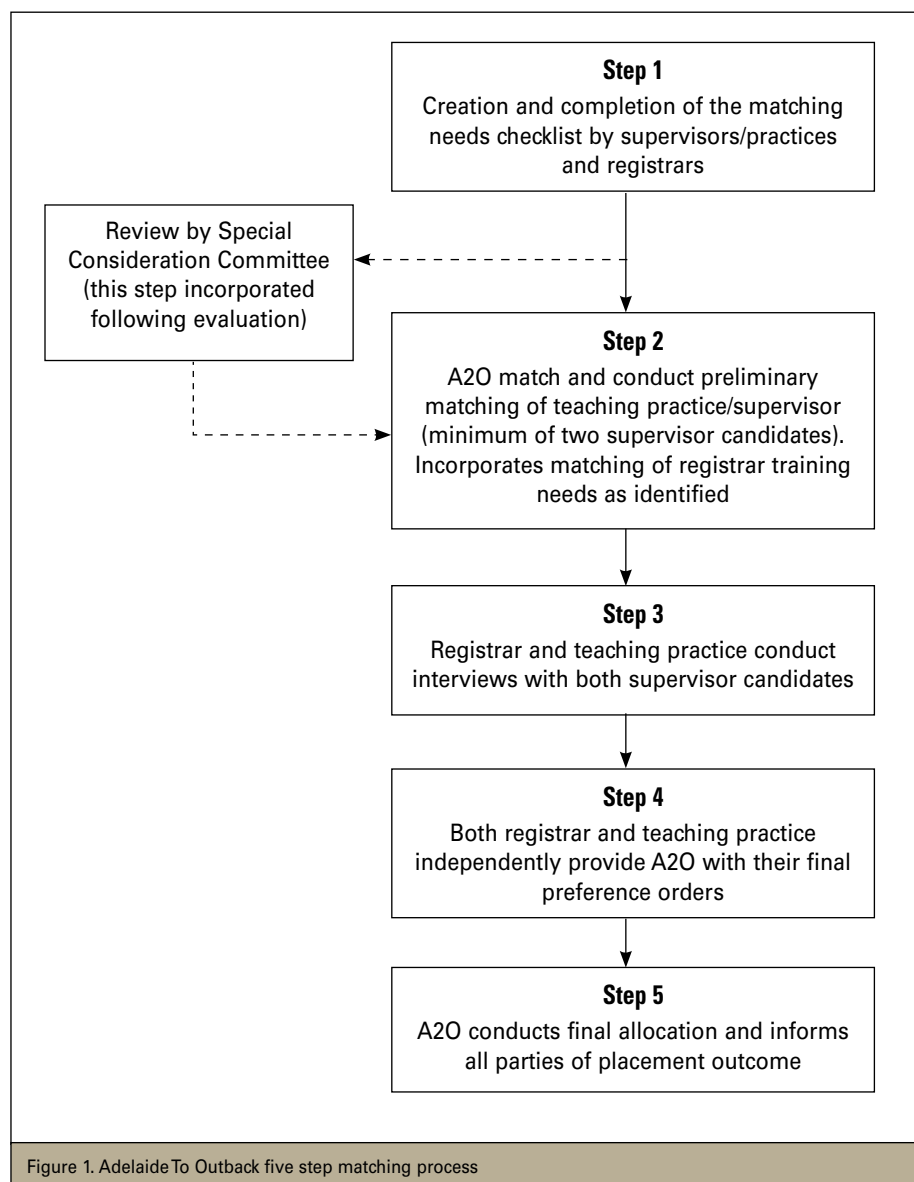


Figure 1. Adelaide To Outback five step matching process

Table 1. Summary of registrar and supervisor responses to key stages of the matching process

Key stages of the matching process	Registrars (n=22)	Supervisors (n=24)	Total (n=46)
	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)
Criteria covered in checklist was adequate	16 (72.2)	18 (81.8) Missing = 2	34 (77.3)
Adequate number of practice/registrar choices was provided	13 (61.9) Missing = 1	15 (62.5)	28 (62.2)
Positive aspects to the interview experience	19 (95) Missing = 2	14 (77.8) Missing = 4	33 (86.8)
Additional information was sought other sources before final choice was made	12 (54.4)	13 (56.5) Missing = 1	25 (56.6)
Satisfied or extremely satisfied with matching process overall	19 (86.3)	22 (95.6) Missing = 1	41 (91.1)

staff and to clarify issues such as pay. For supervisors it provided the opportunity to meet the registrars face-to-face.

Drawbacks from a registrar perspective included the inexperience of some practices with interviews and in some cases the lack of opportunity to visit practices more than once. Negative aspects reported by supervisors included the use of telephone interviews, timing of interviews and the expectations of registrars.

To improve the interview process, supervisors suggested that information about the registrar be provided before the interview and that resumes be provided at the interview. Registrars suggested that informing the practices about terms and conditions of employment and providing them with information on how to interview would improve the process.

Decision making process and final allocation

In sorting their final preference order, 54.5% of registrars sought additional information about the practice and/or supervisors from other registrars, practice websites and other doctors in the region (*Table 1*). Similarly, more than half of the supervisors (56.5%) sought additional information about the registrars before making their final decision. The main source of information was from other supervisors as well as information from A2O and judgments guided by 'gut feeling'.

Registrars and supervisors were asked for the most important factor influencing their final choice. Proximity to home, 'feel' of the practice, and working hours were cited as the most important factors for registrars, while supervisors cited personality of the registrar, ability to fit in with practice, practice feedback, and the registrar's motivation (*Table 2*).

Eighty-two percent of registrars and 86% of supervisors were offered their practice of first preference.

Overall satisfaction with matching process

When rating the matching process overall, 95.6% of supervisors were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the process, compared to 86.3% of registrars (*Table 1*).

Discussion

This evaluation has shown that A2O's model is successful in allowing both registrars and supervisors to have input into a process that can be transparent and equitable while remaining manageable for A2O.

The process has shifted administrative effort from the practices and registrars to the training program management, and balances individual requirements with those of the training program. For example, A2O can use this process to ensure that all regions receive a fair distribution of registrars and that practices can have consistency of placements (organisational aspect) while also addressing

individual registrar learning requirements (educational aspect).

The evaluation highlighted a number of areas for improvement, such as additional items for the matching needs checklist. Items with general applicability (such as GP age and gender and community information) have been incorporated into subsequent versions of the checklists. Others which were more practice based have been recommended for discussion during the interviews (eg. on-call duties, nursing home visits). An interview guide has been developed by A2O to assist registrars and supervisors with their interviews, the most important part of the matching process.

Adelaide To Outback has created a Special Consideration Committee as a parallel process that informs the matching process. This committee can assess submissions from registrars seeking special consideration in placement location and/or exemption from aspects of their training program obligation due to personal circumstances.

Overall, registrars and supervisors are satisfied with the A2O placement model. The evaluation has confirmed that the process works from both an educational and organisational perspective. The process has been continually refined, particularly as the number of placements and registrars have increased. The success of the A2O model for matching registrars and practices suggests it

Table 2. Most important factors influencing final selection of practice or registrar

	Most important factor influence final choice	Frequency*
Registrars	Proximity to home/location	9
	Feel of practice/interest in teaching/setup	9
	Work hours/part time/on-call	8
	Type of practice/size, patient profile/allied health services	6
	Met my needs (eg. special skills, procedures)	2
	Opinion of other registrar	1
	Subtotal	35
Supervisors	Personality/confidence	9
	Practice feedback/fit in with practice	6
	Motivation of registrar	4
	Keenness to visit/interest in area	3
	Type of work (eg. part time, procedural)	3
	Referees	2
	Other	2
	Reliable	1
	Experience	1
	Not involved	1
	Subtotal	32

* Multiple responses

is worthy of consideration by other vocational training programs, particularly as the framework can be tailored to reflect the needs of different training regions and registrars.

Implications for general practice

- Processes for matching registrars and supervisors can be adapted to meet local regional needs.
- The interview is important in the matching process.
- Different factors affect decisions made by registrars and supervisors.
- Both registrars and supervisors had a high level of satisfaction, despite limited choices.

Conflict of interest: none declared.

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