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PRESS NOTICE

Association of Surgeons in Training (ASiT) President Calls on MTAS Review Panel for Further Clarity and More Far Reaching Outcomes

Mr Conor Marron, President of the Association of Surgeons in Training (ASiT), has written to the Chairman of the commissioned MTAS Review Panel, Professor Neil Douglas, in order to outline the major concerns of the Association of Surgeons in Training with the Review panel's proposed actions. ASiT suggest urgent work that needs to be undertaken in order to provide continuing support of the review to ensure that all of the best doctors, who are best suited to being trained to the level of consultant, and hence provide the highest quality consultant-delivered care to our patients in the future, are selected.

ASiT, like the British Medical Association Junior Doctor's Committee (BMA JDC), and Doctor's Pressure Group, RemedyUK, have major concerns and reservations over the Medical Training Application Service (MTAS) process for selecting doctors into specialty training positions. The ever-increasing number of flaws identified have resulted in trainees having little confidence in the system. This has been psychologically damaging to those trainees not shortlisted who now fear an end to their training within the UK.

Mr Marron says "The serious flaws in the shortlisting processes have led to a very high level of pressure and insecurity for these doctors. It is bad enough coping with the demands of what can be an incredibly difficult, but rewarding, job without having to cope with the stresses of seeing what many perceive as the end of their training and career that they had thought they were entering into".

The implications for patient care cannot be underestimated, as this process represents one chance in which to select the best doctors, most suited to be trained to the level of consultant, in order that they can provide the highest possible standard of consultant-delivered patient care in the future. It must also be recognised that many excellent quality trainees have been shortlisted by this process and have been subsequently interviewed, but that we want a process that will ultimately provide not just some, but all of the best doctors who are best suited to training and delivering patient care in the future as consultants.

Mr Marron tells us "the patients in the NHS deserve to be treated by the best, most skilled, and highly qualified doctors, and we are concerned at the minute as although a lot of those shortlisted to date fulfill this criteria, some excellent quality doctors may be lost to the NHS through the ineptitude of the system to adequately recognise these factors."

ASiT lobbied the Secretary of State for Health demanding an urgent review of the flawed application process, which contributed to the formation of a Review Panel. However ASiT have major reservations that this will not go far enough to redress the problems faced, and that the processes suggested by this panel may indeed further discriminate against trainees.

Mr Marron states “the makeup of the review panel causes us great concern, in that the ability of the panel to objectively assess the failures of a process, which many of the panel contributed to initially, is seriously compromised. The lack of adequate trainee representation, for example with no surgical trainees present, leads us and our members to be skeptical that the process will fail to deliver or recognise the needs of this group of trainees.”

ASiT have stated to the review panel a list of conditions required to be met urgently for ASiT to continue to support the review process. ASiT have insisted that the panel make a clear and firm statement that this will be carried out.

The Issues surrounding the MTAS system has created a cloud around all appointments made under this process and the public would be right to lose confidence that they will be treated by the best doctors available, as even those who are highly qualified, and have been shortlisted, have now been discredited by the failures in the process, and the repeated statements that the process has not identified the ‘best’ candidates. ASiT wish to clearly state that we believe that those people selected to surgical training will be of the highest possible calibre.

Whilst ASiT have not yet called for the entire process to be halted we share many of the concerns of the BMA JDC and RemedyUK. ASiT feel that there are factors specific to surgery that differ from many other specialties and that we require to address these specific concerns for surgical trainees, which may be slightly different to all of the trainees from many specialties represented by the BMA JDC and RemedyUK.

ASiT see a major problem in terms of funding and resourcing of the selection systems, with the failure of the Department of Health to adequately recognise the time and finances required to run the process they have tried to introduce. Given the expenditure in the training of so many surgical trainees to the levels they have attained already, the extra finances in order that sufficient numbers of shortlisters and interviewers should have been a very small proportion and should have been made available.

Mr Marron states “the financial implications due to the complete lack of funding and resourcing of the application process is a fundamental error, and in my opinion a major contributing factor to the failures and responsibility lies firmly with the Department of Health. Whilst significant funds were invested in the flawed IT system, the simple fact of the matter was that not enough people were made available on the ground through lack of funds, and instruction to free up time for consultants to participate in the process. This is a recurring theme in Surgery at the present time, and if a value is not attributed to the time required for training, and the processes surrounding it, as a matter of urgency, then not only will we not select the best candidates, but we will also be unable to train them.”

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

Full text of the letter to Professor Douglas, and the Statement of ASiT’s position are attached.

ASiT is a registered charity representing the needs and voice of Surgical Trainees to the Surgical Royal Colleges and other training bodies, and has a voluntary membership of over 1900 Surgical Trainees, making it one of the largest surgical organisations in the country. Through links with other surgical specialty trainee organisations on its council, ASiT represents trainees from all specialties.

Further information on ASiT can be found on its website at www.asit.org

The ASiT President is available for contact and further comment either by e-mail to cdmarron@mac.com, or by telephone on 07790 012332.

ASiT Council Member Ben Creswell will be attending the RemedyUK White Coat March on Saturday 17th March and will be available for interview and comment which can be arranged by telephoning 07946 516450.