

UK Survey on Parental Leave Among Neurosurgeons: Have We Got the Balance Right?

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Introduction

Neurosurgical training often overlaps with when residents may be starting a family. There is an increase in women going into medical training and a cultural shift of men as primary childcare givers. This calls for a debate on how to retain and attract residents having children . This is balanced with the need to optimise surgical training opportunities and run an efficient service.

In the UK, women can take upto 52 weeks leave and men 2 weeks . Since 2015, the government has introduced the Shared Parental Leave policy (SPL) which allows parents to share up to 52 weeks of leave. There is no data on the utilisation of this allowance by neurosurgical residents.

Methods

Online anonymised survey approved by the Society of British Neurosurgeons (SBNS) academic committee. The questions established the stage of training at which parental leave was taken, available support upon return to work, consideration of job share or part time employment and suggestions to improve implementation of SPL within the demands of a neurosurgical career.

Results

50/88 (56.1%) respondents were parents (10 female, 40 male)

of which all mothers and 30/39 (76.9%) fathers took parental leave.

5/8 mothers and 11/31 fathers would consider shared parental

leave in the future. 8/31 fathers and 3/8 mothers would job share.

7/8 mothers were offered no support on return to work. A recurring

concern was decline in surgical skills.

Conclusions

Our results suggest limited support is available for neurosurgeons taking parental leave. Potential improvements as suggested by respondents include cultural acceptance and facilitation of job sharing or part time work, staged return, mentorship, choice of rotation location and accrual of annual leave. Open discussion is needed in order to offer options that balance the rigorous standards required to become a competent neurosurgeon with the realities of family life in line with other surgical specialties and other countries.

Learning Objectives

There needs to be a wider discussion on supporting the needs of neurosurgical trainees as they start family life whilst balancing the rigour of training.