

Health Informatics Education: Are we Building Capacity?

Alice Breton

Director e-Learning, Faculty of Health Informatics, Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh

Abstract and Objective

Workforce development and associated professionalism are essential for leveraging the benefits of technology to improve healthcare delivery [1]. However there is limited knowledge about how health informatics education contributes to workforce capacity. This study reports the findings of a small online questionnaire of graduates to investigate why people choose to study Health Informatics and the impact of studying on their career. While the sample size is too small to provide generalisability it does offer a snapshot of Health Informatics graduates. The results indicate that they are mid career, from diverse backgrounds, with differing motivations for studying Health Informatics. While there is evidence of a positive impact on current roles and movement to Health Informatics roles, the amount of time spent on Health Informatics activities is not particularly high (52% spend less than 20%). Membership of a Health Informatics professional body is also low. These results mirror other studies highlighting the need for further information about the workforce [2,3].

Keywords:

Medical informatics, Health manpower, Health personnel-education

Methods

47 graduates from a Health Informatics postgraduate programme were asked to complete a short online questionnaire. Invited participants were predominantly from the UK but also based internationally. Participants were provided guarantee of anonymity and consented to participate. The question set emerged from ongoing discussions with students and graduates and was piloted during completion of an earlier unpublished study. Questions related to graduate characteristics, motivation for studying and perceived outcome of study in terms of current and future employment prospects. In total, 31 questionnaires were completed providing a response rate of 66%. The sample size and response rate did not warrant in depth statistical analysis.

Results

Graduate Characteristics	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respondents were predominantly male and in the age category 31-50• 65% identified themselves as a Medical Professional• Main reason for studying was to extend knowledge in an areas relevant to chosen career, the majority felt this goal was met	
Impact of Study on Work	
Study led to change of employment	42%
Time spent on Health Informatics	52% spent less than 20%
Impact on work (predominant response)	Wider range of projects without changing role
Impact on future career (predominant response)	Additional skills to be more effective in chosen career
Member of HI Professional Body	23%

Conclusion

This exploratory study provides an insight into the outcome of Health Informatics education, highlighting the diversity of graduate expectations and experiences. This has implications for education providers to ensure that programmes are relevant and fit for purpose. Longer term follow-up of graduates would provide more information about the long term impact of programmes such as this one and their impact on building workforce capacity.

References

- [1] Hersh, W., Wright, A. What Workforce is needed to implement the health information technology agenda? Analysis from the HIMSS Analytics™ Database. AMIA Annu Symp Proc. 2008; 2008: 303–307.
- [2] Assist NHS Informatics Workforce Survey. Assist, 2007/8 http://www.bcs.org//upload/pdf/workforcesurvey_2008.pdf [accessed 9 October 2009]
- [3] A Review of the Australian Health Informatics Workforce. A Report by the Health Informatics Society of Australia Sept 2009.

Address for correspondence

aliceb@rcsed.ac.uk