Preparing undergraduates for a career in primary care

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Fisher and McDermott highlight workplace culture as critical for GP retention but largely overlook upstream factors that prepare future practitioners for the challenges of a career in primary care. Likewise, the RCGP paper ‘Fit for the Future’ calls for ‘induction and career support programmes for early career GPs’ but omits the importance of undergraduate education in preparing doctors to work in primary care. Despite the 2016 Wass report, there has been little progress in addressing the low status of general practice in UK medical schools. This situation is likely only to worsen with the forthcoming national Medical Licensing Assessment (MLA) and anticipation of a league table of medical school performance. Through its Single Best Answer format and focus on diagnoses, tests and drugs, the MLA only engages students in the component of general practice that overlaps with diagnostic hospital medicine. It also drives a focus upon events (e.g. presentations or drug side effects) that are relatively uncommon in general practice. To fulfil the government’s expectation that 50% of medical students become GPs, expanded undergraduate preparation for the quotidian challenges of the primary care workplace must become a priority.

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