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Defining the Good Surgical Resident: A Qualitative Analysis Exploring the Attributes of the Highly Performing Surgical Resident

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INTRODUCTION/AIMS

Surgical residency provides the essential skills required to become a successful SET registrar. Yet the role of the surgical resident remains largely undefined. While the RACS JDOCs framework provides a useful guide, no published research explores what makes a good surgical resident.¹ Aiming to supplement the JDOCs framework and help residents become valuable team members and successful SET trainee candidates, we investigate what constitutes a 'good' surgical resident from the surgical resident and SET registrar perspectives.

RESULTS

Amongst surgical residents 5 themes were identified: Efficiency: Mastering the 'Mundane', 'Stepping Up': The Ready-Made Registrar, The Enthusiastic Scholar, First do no Harm: A Safe Practitioner, and No Resident is an Island: A Team Player. Themes described by registrars included: A Dependable Sidekick, Recognising Gaps: It's ok to say 'I don't know', Confident versus Competent: Safety is 'a tricky balance', A Perfect Fit in The Team, and Enthusiasm: A Keen Bean will Flower. Registrar themes with relevant subthemes, core competencies and quotations are presented here.

METHOD

A qualitative research approach was utilised employing reflexive thematic analysis. Using semi-structured interviews, 10 surgical residents and 10 SET registrars across 8 surgical specialties were interviewed. Mean interview duration was 19.6 minutes.

CONCLUSION

Overall residents perspectives reflected those of the SET registrars. Themes correlated well with 9 of 10 RACS competencies and JDocs Framework.^{1,2} Knowledge of the attributes of the highly performing surgical resident may help those contemplating a career in surgery throughout their early surgical years.

A dependable sidekick: Being Dependable and Proactive

Subthemes

- Communicates honestly with their registrar and the rest of the team
- Able to navigate barriers to communication when the registrar is in theatre and unavailable
- Capable of recognizing issues independently and escalating concerns early



General Surgery SET (1)

Residents who are honest communicators make it so much easier....if I don't trust a resident...don't trust they will tell me when things are going wrong or acknowledge when they're not sure about things.....that makes things really difficult...

Plastic Surgery SET (3)

Showing initiative and being proactive are the big keys for me... initiative I place really highly as it shows a higher level of thinking...residents who do this excel

RACS Core Competencies

- Communication
- Medical Expertise
- Judgement and Clinical Decision Making

Confident versus Competence: Safety is 'a tricky balance'

Subthemes

- Recognizes confidence should reflect competence
- Practices within their own scope and recognizes their limitations
- Is comfortable with their abilities acknowledging inherent gaps in ability are inevitable and improvement will come with more experience



Urology SET 4 (2)

There's also being able to carefully have insight into their practice.....get advice when required.....lack of insight is dangerous

General Surgery SET (1)

Ultimately you want to know (the resident) will acknowledge when they feel they're out of their depth ...

Vascular Surgery SET (3)

Residents that have struggled on a surgical rotation are the ones who don't realize their gaps in knowledge.... don't care, don't try to improve do not communicate that they don't know....a good resident identifies gaps in knowledge... works to improve them

RACS Core Competencies

- Judgement and Clinical decision making
- Medical Expertise
- Professionalism

Recognising your gaps: Its ok to say 'I don't know'

Subthemes

- Has insight into their limitations and gaps in knowledge and uses these to guide questions and make meaningful changes
- Is able to take feedback on board to facilitate learning and development



General Surgery SET (1)

You want to find that sweet spot in the middle of confidence where (the resident) can start to exercise some autonomy.... make decisions and grow.....but then not so far that they're taking on too much....overextending and making decisions they probably shouldn't....it's a tricky balance.

Vascular Surgery SET (2)

Residents should recognise their limitations ...if you don't know your limits then it is hazardous to the safety of our patients....

RACS Core Competencies

- Judgement and Clinical decision making
- Scholarship and Teaching
- Medical Expertise
- Professionalism

A perfect fit: Teamwork and communication

Subthemes

- Capable of interacting and communicating with all members of the team
- Adapts to the strengths and weaknesses of others within the team
- Supports other members of the team



Urology SET 4 (2)

Just being a good team person who works well in a team...someone able to bring good qualities to the team...

Urology SET (2)

Being a good surgical resident involves teamwork skills....you're going to work with people of all different professions including the nursing staff....occupational therapists... physiotherapists....social workers...registrars...consultants.. students

RACS Core Competencies

- Teamwork and Collaboration
- Health Advocacy
- Communication

Enthusiasm: A keen bean will flower

Subthemes

- Is teachable
- Has adequate knowledge
- Displays enthusiasms enabling knowledge seeking behavior
- Sees every opportunity as a learning opportunity



General Surgery SET 4 (1)

Number one is that they're interested....at least that they've got an open mind to the speciality... if they're interested and enjoy the rotation then all the other things follow...

General Surgery SET (1)

You don't need to be at a registrar level of knowledge....but you do want to have someone that's teachable and open to learning and growing...

RACS Core Competencies

- Scholarship and Teaching

REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- [1]RACS, JDOCs Framework PDF, available online.
 - RACS competencies. <https://www.surgeons.org/en/Trainees/the-set-program/racs-competencies>
- Article published online (ANZ journal of surgery). *Defining the good surgical resident: A resident and registrar perspective*