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Why and when do Danish medical doctors choose to become a general practitioner?

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Background and Aim: Continued supply of qualified general practitioners is essential for the vitality of the primary health care sector. In Denmark however we have observed a decline in the number of applicants for our family medicine specialist training program, leaving some posts vacant. The aim of study is to examine why and when Danish junior doctors choose family medicine as their future specialty.

Method: We carried out two focus group interviews with medical doctors from two regions. An academic employee from the Danish College of Family Medicine mediated the interviews assisted by a family medicine trainee. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data was analyzed independently by two researchers, who had not taken part in the interviews. The analysis was based on a ground theory approach.

Results: The data was categorized into themes such as; family medicine in pre-graduate training the structure of the postgraduate educational program, working conditions, respect for general practice, uncertainty about the future for general practice as a profession, when did I decide to choose family medicine.

Out of these themes we identified factors, which influenced the choice of the junior doctors. Exposure to general practice as part the basic postgraduate training programme was important. Acceptance of the postgraduate training programme also has a positive impact. Factors with negative impact were limited awareness of family medicine during medical school and worrying expectations to the future working conditions. The time of the choice was individual but many seem to decide after basic postgraduate training.

Conclusion: This study indicates that exposure to general practice during basic postgraduate training has a positive impact on young doctors' choice of a career as general practitioners. But the expectations to the future working conditions in general practice do also play a role.