Consultant appraisal: serving two masters

Sir,

I was interested to read Dr Winearls’ editorial on consultant appraisal,1 which was, in the main, a factual report of the current situation and future prospects. However, I would take issue with his views on appraisal of academic clinicians, where he recognizes the need to serve two (if not more) masters but sees the solution as separate appraisal from the two main institutions (NHS and University).

It is clear that, despite opportunities for consultant expansion, academic medicine is under threat, and a number of chairs currently remain unfilled.2 There are already considerable pressures on the time of academic clinicians,3 who are expected to undertake clinical work within the NHS and teaching within the hospital and university. At the same time, they are expected to prosecute cutting-edge research, contribute to their university’s RAE submission, and to raise much more of their support externally than in the past. Many carry substantial administrative burdens. A peek into the future suggests that an early relief of this pressure is unlikely.4

Against this background, consultant appraisal has much to offer the clinical academic. Accepting the requirements for revalidation5 and governance,6 there is considerable logic in academics sitting down with their two main employers to discuss what is a reasonable workload and how to balance competing demands. All too often in the past, the failure to meet in this way has resulted in both sides expecting delivery of a full-time service. It is my belief that consultant appraisal, carried out in the right spirit, and between the two institutions, will make the resulting job plans of academics more realistic. Indeed, on a wider basis, within departments, it might allow a fairer distribution of clinical, teaching, and research work, based on individual strengths.3

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References


Sir,

Professor Webb proposes a sensible compromise for academic consultants regarding joint appraisal. My reservations were the suggestion that it should be done by either the Trust or the University. They will be appraising/assessing different components of the consultant’s job. If the individuals would be comfortable with a three-way dialogue, then a balanced position on the competing pressure and aims could be reached.

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