

Self-Reported Educational Needs by Pediatric Trainees in Portugal: An Overview by the Workgroup of Trainees in Pediatrics

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In Portugal, the training program in Pediatrics is a five-year *curriculum*, including three years of mandatory basic training in general pediatrics and two years of elective clinical rotations in subspecialized areas. Clinical training is often complemented by courses and conferences selected by trainees, according to their opportunities and preferences, consolidating and updating their knowledge. However, little is known about views of the trainees on what is lacking or how these training opportunities would best serve their needs.

Given the importance of the topic, which shapes the future of pediatrics in Portugal, and the lack of objective knowledge on the matter, the *Grupo de Internos de Pediatria* (Workgroup of Trainees in Pediatrics) of the Sociedade Portuguesa de Pediatria (GIP-SPP) sought to identify opportunities to meet the needs of pediatric trainees in Portugal.

A short online survey to assess educational needs among pediatric trainees was developed by GIP-SPP and sent to the pediatric trainees (n = 374) who had subscribed to the workgroup mailing list. The survey was open from February 27th, 2021, to May 27th, 2021. Each participant was given a chance to answer the questions. The survey included four multiple-choice questions and one short-answer question on preferred course formats (physical attendance / online), course type (theoretical review, clinical cases discussion, or mixed theoretical and practical model), and topics to be included in future courses. In the last section, trainees could select the three most relevant topics from a drop-down list, which included:

- Clinical topics addressed in a symptom-based approach, disease reviews, or complementary diagnosis methods;
- Complementary subjects, such as epidemiology, biostatistics / statistical software use, how to write a *curriculum vitae*, medical writing, and soft skills in

medical practice;

- Alternative pathways in pediatrics, such as medical volunteering, academic or research careers and pharmaceutical industry.

The fourth question asked trainees to determine pediatric areas of expertise that most lacked learning opportunities. Lastly, we asked an open question to receive suggestions or comments.

Around 30% (n = 114) of our subscribers responded to the survey, the majority (61.4%) of whom preferred online to in-person courses in a mixed theoretical and practical model (85.0%). Regarding the topics to be included in future courses, most trainees would like to focus on clinical topics: symptom-based approach (38.9%), followed by other topics: how to write a *curriculum vitae* and medical writing (25.7%) and other topics: epidemiology, biostatistics, and statistical software use practical course (21.6%). The three pediatric areas of expertise that were identified as most lacking additional learning opportunities included childcare / puericulture (38.1%), pediatric emergency care (36.3%), and pediatric intensive care (31.9%). Finally, a few suggestions were made as to having access to more opportunities in humanitarian pediatrics, basic principles of radiological interpretation, pediatric dermatology, and pediatric palliative care.

Collectively, these findings shed some light on what can be improved throughout the pediatrics training program in Portugal and what trainees perceive as gaps in their training. Despite the challenges imposed by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, an opportunity was also provided to adjust medical training to our current needs. The Sociedade Portuguesa de Pediatria has been following these trends closely, having already promoted online learning activities. We hope this survey helps us make further adjustments to the curriculum and provide other educational opportunities for pediatric trainees in Portugal.

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Author Contributions

ARC, MVM and RBB participated in the study conception or design. ARC, MVM and RBB participated in acquisition of data. ARC, MVM, DS, JFM, JC and RBB participated in the analysis or interpretation of data. ARC, MVM and RBB participated in the drafting of the manuscript. ARC, MVM, DS, JFM, JC and RBB participated in the critical revision of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

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