Delivering general paediatric surgery in Ireland: how to avert a crisis?

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Dear Editor,

We commend the efforts of Professor Grace and associates in highlighting the crisis in the provision of the General Surgery of Childhood in regional Ireland. It is universally accepted that the specialty of paediatric surgery developed with the establishment of the British Association of Paediatric Surgeons in 1953. The association's aim was 'to set a standard, not to create a monopoly'. For various reasons (Calmanisation, European Working Time Directive, specialisation throughout surgery) a monopoly has been created, such that the General Surgery of Childhood will soon only be provided by trained paediatric surgeons in tertiary centres.

We would like to suggest an alternative solution to this problem rather than those in Boyle's article [1]. Some paediatric surgical trainees could be attracted to work in regional centres by sheer satisfaction of providing a top-class service to local patients. These appointments would ensure

- (a) the ongoing provision of safe elective and emergency surgery to babies and children, including the use of minimal access techniques
- (b) the teaching and training of 'adult' surgery trainees, and allied health workers, in the General Surgery of Childhood, and

- (c) increased capacity for the specialist paediatric centre(s) to provide the best service and perform the best research possible for children with complex disorders, unencumbered by an increasing demand for the common less complicated operations previously done locally.

These appointments could be offered in conjunction with honorary roles in the specialist children's hospital(s) contributing to continuing professional development, and ensuring maintenance of specialist skills. The appointments could include more than one regional centre.

Preservation of local provision of the General Surgery of Childhood benefits the children, the community, the local hospitals and the tertiary hospitals. We look forward to working with our 'adult' surgical colleagues to avert the looming crisis.

References

1. Boyle E, Walsh SR, Grace PA (2012) The delivery of general paediatric surgery in Ireland: a survey of higher surgical trainees. *Ir J Med Sci* 181(4):459–462

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