

Under the Microscope: Resident experiences of the remediation process and their struggle for confidence, competence and well-being

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Background

The literature on remediation is mostly limited to descriptions and evaluations of programs from a faculty perspective.

Research describing the lived experience of trainees on remediation is largely absent from discussions of best practices and protocols.

Research Questions

How do residents make sense of their remediation experience?

- How do they understand the impact of the remediation process on their:
 - professional identity,
 - professional relationships,
 - performance, and
 - learning.

Qualitative Methodology

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

The goal is to explore how participants make sense of their lived experience. IPA is concerned with the individual's personal perception and narrative explanations of critical events:

- One-on-one interviews with residents on remediation – formal (n=8) or informal (n=1)
- Data analysis – close reading of transcripts, annotate, list emergent themes, create superordinate themes

Getting the News

“At the beginning of the remediation, I was shocked, stunned... I didn’t know exactly what it meant. I didn’t know what the trajectory would be and what the outcome is for a lot of these cases. I hadn’t really known of any other Residents under remediation. I thought it was a terrible thing.” R05

Getting the News

- *Remediation status a surprise for some.*
- *A serious disturbing threat to self and career.*
- *Not sure what was going to happen.*
- *Little sense of control or power.*
- *External factors identified as a cause of difficulties.*

Theme 1: Wearing the Donkey Hat Stigma:

“It felt like you’re branded, you have a scarlet letter and you need to tell every supervisor thereafter that you’ve had this experience, and you need extra help and you need to be paid closer attention to.” R11

Theme 1: Wearing the Donkey Hat Stigma:

Isolated and marked as a problem.

- *There was a common perception that they were viewed differently and treated differently by staff and peers.*
- *A strong sense of failure and shame.*
- *Significant loss of confidence in multiple areas.*

Theme 2: Under the Microscope

Scrutiny and Negative Bias:

“A dumb question coming from a person on remediation is probably looked at quite a bit differently than a dumb question coming from someone who has been highlighted as very capable and one of the best residents in the program.” 05

“For the three rotation they knew about it, for sure I was watched closer and the one that the supervisor was unaware that I was on remediation, I mean I was there just like a regular resident, nothing special about it. That is the one that worked better.” 07

Theme 2: Under the Microscope ***Scrutiny and Negative Bias:***

Perceived high levels of negative scrutiny were linked to:

- Increased anxiety and self-silencing
- Diminished experimentation with new behaviors
- Reduced learning opportunities and autonomy

Theme 3: The Emotional Storm

“I was just overwhelmed with fear and negativity and just despair almost and I think I shut down a lot. I think I tried to work very, very hard. But, I think despite all of the feelings, when you’re under remediation and you have that complex and everything that you do, it’s not so much anymore out of curiosity and passion. It’s out of fear. And I find learning in that atmosphere is not nearly as productive. I think it will take you twice the amount of time, if not three times ... to accomplish certain things, than it would otherwise, if you were more free and learning things. So that’s the catch-22 of remediation.” R05

Theme 3: The Emotional Storm

- Feeling punished
- Isolated
- Fearful and withdrawn
- Resentful
- Guilty

Theme 5: Finding Support

“I felt like they told me that I could do it. They were very supportive and encouraging, and they would spend the time to go through cases with me and explain things. I don’t know how to explain it, but they just wouldn’t make me feel terrible for not knowing. And, they would push me a bit more in terms of asking me questions to try to help me connect things.” R10

Theme 5: Finding Support

- Supervisor ‘believes in you’
- non-judgmental
- supportive/encouraging
- provides specific feedback
- clarifies weaknesses & expectations
- mentor as advocate/ role model
- Support/coaching services helpful

Theme 6: Getting Through

“I guess all I can really do is be the resident who has been remediated, and move on, in that respect, and show that remediation works or that I’m a successful remediation candidate. So that’s the new reality that I’m adjusting to with my program director, and with the rest of the training committee.” R07

Theme 6: Getting Through

Individual Behaviors:

- Accept and move on
- Going easy on yourself
- Reframing set-backs
- Reaching out
- Being pro-active about learning needs and goals
- Clarifying expectations
- Persistent commitment to finding a way through

Theme 4: Plan as constructed. Plan as lived.

“I was supposed to have regular meetings but I had a real hard time setting them up and finding time, both from my side and from the staff side. I was given a template of a schedule but I couldn’t really follow it. ” R07

Theme 4: Plan as constructed. Plan as lived.

- *Little control/input into plan*
- *Process different from plan*
- *Logistically unrealistic*
- *Left alone to manage*
- *Mismatch of expectations*
- *More an evaluative process than a structure learning opportunity*

What Helped?

- Faculty and program directors checking in with residents and listening to and responding creatively to their expressed learning needs,
- Time off to deal with personal challenges,
- Formally structured learning opportunities,
- Protected times for academic mentoring, coaching and psychological support,
- Opportunities to learn, gain confidence, and regain autonomy in a supportive supervisory relationship,
- Supervisors who believe in the resident and acknowledged their strengths as well as their weaknesses, and communicated clear expectations and constructive, specific feedback,
- Positive role models/mentors/advocates; especially those who have struggled themselves,
- Clinical rotations and shifts where department knew/did not know they were on remediation,

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Conclusion

- **Additional Burden:** Remediation was viewed as a psychologically challenging process that undermined professional and personal confidence, and added additional burdens to academic learning and performance situations.
- **Isolation and Loss of Resources:** The remediation role was perceived as a stigmatized position that isolated residents within their training community and negatively altered their relationships with others.
- **Increased Distress and Diminished Learning:** Increased scrutiny and unanticipated logistical demands were seen as leading to heightened distress, additional learning difficulties, decreased autonomy and fewer learning opportunities.
- **Positive Relationships a Key Resource:** Individual adaptive behaviors and positive supervisory relationships were understood as improving learning, self-confidence and performance.

Limitations

- We have analyzed and interpreted the subjective perspectives of a small group of residents in remediation who volunteered to be interviewed. The themes extracted may not be generalizable to the inner experiences of other trainees on remediation.

Thank You / Questions

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