



INTRODUCTION

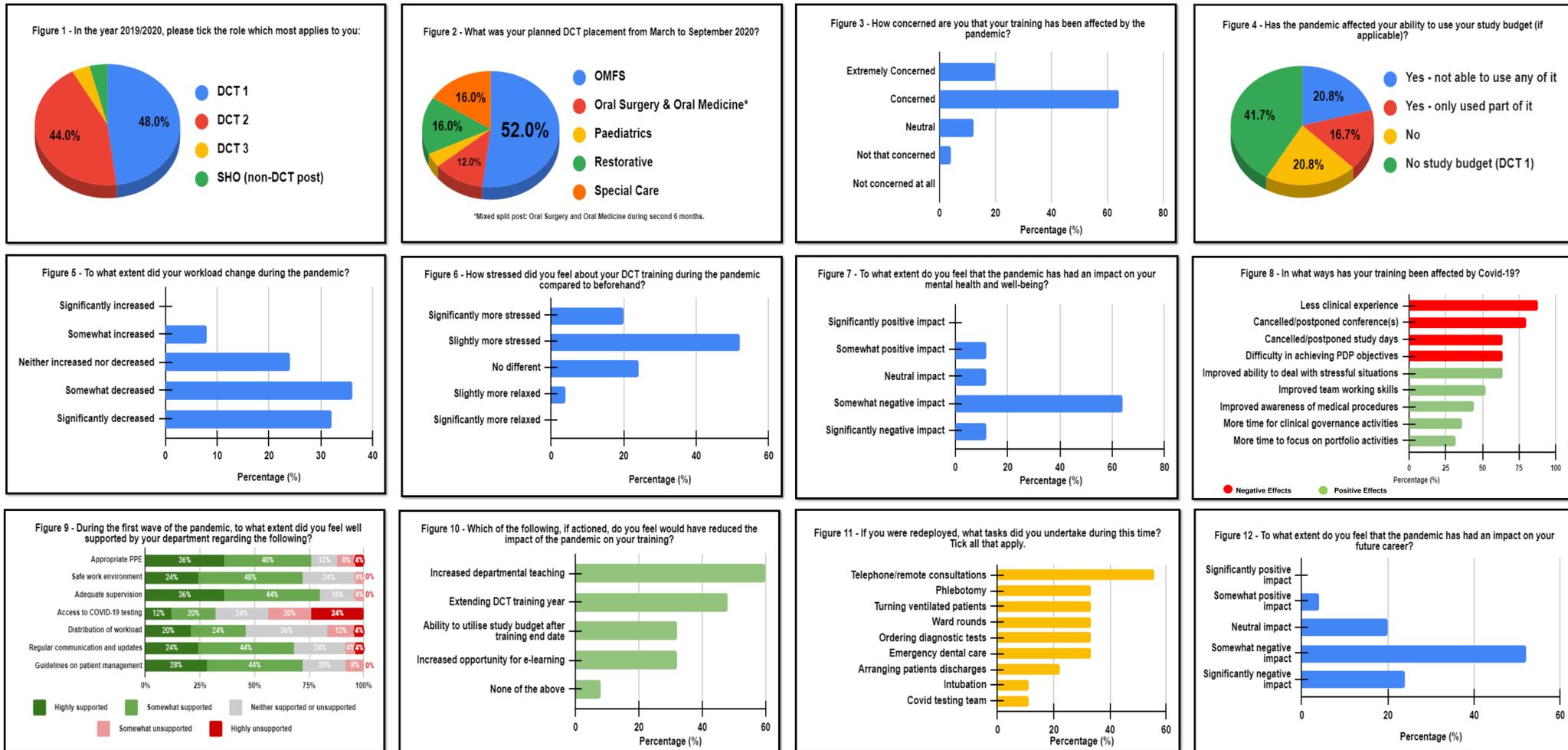
- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Dental Core Training (DCT) in Wales is yet to be fully explored.^{1,2}
- There are 66 DCT posts in Wales, with some offering split 6 month posts where trainees are able to experience two different dental settings over the year.
- Many DCTs were redeployed during the first wave of Covid-19 to urgent dental centres and other non-dental clinical environments.

METHOD

- A 20 question online survey was designed and ethical approval granted by Cardiff University Dental School Research Ethics Committee (ref: 2029a).³
- A pilot was carried out (8 DCTs) and the survey updated accordingly.
- The survey was emailed to DCTs using the Health Education and Improvement Wales mailing list in accordance with GDPR.
- Inclusion Criteria: those eligible for the study were DCTs during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic (March 2020 to September 2020) in Wales.

RESULTS

There were 25 out of a possible 66 responses (38%). 11 core trainees were asked to redeploy to another setting during the pandemic (44%). Settings included critical care, acute medical wards, oral and maxillofacial units and urgent dental centres. Figure 11 shows the various tasks undertaken during redeployment.



'I struggled a lot with my mental health during March - May 2020 of the pandemic. It improved after processes were put in place for safe working/patient management and a regular system/rota was established.'

'Reduced clinical experience so skills not as well developed as desired'

'I was able to significantly improve other skills, like leadership and communication'

'Stressed re: the lack of provision of online substitutes in place of study days. Some replacement was provided, however on the whole this was limited. It was stressful to miss out on so much learning.'

DISCUSSION

- The majority of trainees are concerned about the impact of the pandemic on their training. They feel it has reduced the number of clinical procedures they have performed and they felt anxious going into their next DCT year with less clinical experience and exposure than previously anticipated.
- The pandemic meant that over half of trainees with a study allowance were not able to use it on educational activities (most courses and conferences were cancelled) and others without a study budget (DCT 1) had their study events cancelled.
- Covid-19 increased stress levels and affected trainee mental health significantly, particularly during the first few months of the pandemic.
- However, the study did find that Covid-19 did have some benefits to training. Over half of trainees felt that they had improved their leadership, communication and team-working skills as a result of working in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. The experience of redeployment was largely viewed as a positive learning experience with trainees improving their medical knowledge and learning new skills in a different clinical environment. DCTs also said that they had a decreased workload as a result of the pandemic and had more time to focus on portfolio activities such as audit and research.
- Interestingly, just under half of all respondents were in favour of extending their training year. This may be due to concern regarding reduced clinical activity.
- The main limitation of the study was the low response rate (38%) despite an email reminder being sent. On average, it is evident that online surveys generally receive a 30-40% response rate.^{4,5} It is therefore accepted that interpretation of survey data should take into account this low number of respondents. Nevertheless the results still provide useful information on the trends in thinking among the DCTs.

CONCLUSION

- The pandemic had a significant impact on dental core training in Wales. DCTs feel concerned about the learning opportunities they may have missed as a result of Covid-19. It made DCTs feel less equipped in terms of clinical experience going into their next roles. The impact of Covid-19 is important for postgraduate training providers to note, as there may be unmet learning needs which may need to be addressed for these clinicians in the future.

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