Welcoming Generation Z: understanding multi-generational working and learning within Radiography

Statement of positionality:

The lead author displays traits from two generations; Generation Y and Generation Z. The interest in the much-argued theory of generational differences stems from experiences of entering the higher education workforce as part of 3.7% of employees under 25 with the average age of employees being 45 [1]. As a minority, the lead author observed those within a similar age group often had comparable values, perceptions, expectations and motivations. Understanding these differences and adapting teaching and management styles appropriately, could impact student and workforce satisfaction and retention. The purpose of this article is to raise awareness of potential generational differences and to start discussions regarding the impact of these differences and similarities within the workplace and education. This article has had input from three generations and all authors recognise the challenges of generalising age groups.

Introduction

For the first time ever, the radiography workforce now comprises of four generations working together: Baby Boomers; Generation X; Generation Y and Generation Z. This article aims to define these generations and offer a set of practical tips for supporting the newest generation, Generation Z, in radiography education and clinical settings. These observations will be supported by reviewing the evidence base on this topic specific to health care professionals as evidence is extremely limited for allied health professionals, especially radiography. By exploring each generation, readers are offered the opportunity to reflect on their own "generational" positioning and thus consider how this may affect their interactions with learners, work colleagues and peers.

Literature review

Although there is a broad range of literature on the topic of generational differences, there is a paucity of evidence which looks specifically at radiographers in higher education and/ or employment in the UK. While one paper was identified which explores managing a multi-generational radiological technician workforce in the US [2], it is noted that the piece does not describe or investigate the needs of Generation Z. Furthermore, the authors of this paper observe that the findings presented may not be fully transferable as professional standards to

practice in the UK differ to that of the US with UK workforce registration requirements linked to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) radiography standards of proficiency [3].

Much of the relatable research on the topic is derived from students in medicine, nursing and midwifery. Perhaps the most notable UK research to date is the *"Mind the Gap Project"* an action research project conducted with student and newly qualified nurses and midwives across Birmingham [4]. Here the project team sourced and collected information specifically on the needs of early career nurses and midwives in a variety of ways. This included: hosting an online crowdsourcing workshop; hosting an interactive conference/event; collecting field data from focus groups and other meetings and reviewing national and international literature. Whilst findings from this research highlighted key considerations for Generation Z, they also noted the need to raise awareness of the generational groups amongst educators, mentors and preceptors highlighting that those leading teams need to understand the needs of each generation so as to maximise engagement and retention.

Attrition figures for students within higher education has been regularly discussed as average attrition rates for UK therapeutic radiography programmes is consistently over 20% [5]. Health Education England have also developed a report and set of resources with aims to address Pre-registration Attrition and Improving Retention (RePAIR) for newly qualified therapeutic radiography practitioners [6]. Understanding the needs of each generation may help educators, learners and clinical radiographers to develop a team-based approach, which is essential to meet rising demands in radiography [7].

It is important to mention that not all evidence supports the generational concepts, however, this has not been specifically evidenced within healthcare. It has been suggested that limited generational differences have been found regarding personality and motivational drivers, however, the observed differences that were found related to age and opposed to generations [8]. No differences were found in technology use and learning characteristics of students in higher education, however, the generations tested did not compare to the generations defined in this article [9].

Generational Groupings

Research suggests different start and end dates for each generation. The dates presented in this article are an average of those presented in the reviewed literature. To note, not everyone

will align with these generalisations and those who are at the start or the end point of a generation may find themselves relating to characteristics from two generations. Furthermore, it is crucial to remember that whilst events can shape personalities there are also other factors to consider such as biology and personal experiences. Although it is acknowledged stereotyping can present challenges, the authors of this paper believe it is important to be aware of these groupings. This is because there is general consensus that each generation has lived through different historical, personal and social events and subsequently those in the same generation tend to have greater identification with, and understanding of, each other better [4].

Baby Boomers (1946 to 1964)

The Baby Boomer generation is often spilt into the early boomers and late boomers but are known for being part of the baby boom once the Second World War had finished. They have lived through historical events such as the Cold War, Vietnam War, Civil Rights Movement, the assassinations of JFK and Martin Luther King, the first moon landing, England winning the world cup and the increase in televisions in the home. Baby Boomers are considered better educated than their predecessors due to the increase in opportunities [2]. They are ambitious, hardworking and committed to their professional goals, have very high expectations and live to work, sometimes to the detriment of the family. They are deemed the workaholic generation [2]. They have absolutely no problem with challenging authority, work very well in crisis and want respect [4]. They are team orientated and the evidence concludes that this is due to the increase of children within schools at that period of time. They like to be liked and want recognition for their achievements. Their development relies on support and feedback. Technology has developed during their lifetime, but they were not brought up with it. This generation will either be involved with technology or ignore its existence until it becomes necessary. Baby Boomers form 25% of the current workforce [4].

Generation X (1965-1980)

Generation X are also known as Gen Xers, the lost generation, latchkey kids or busters, due to the decrease in birth rate after the Baby Boomers [4]. The latchkey kid definition is derived from a reduction in parental supervision, due to an increase in dual income families and divorces. Both parents working meant children would often be placed in child care at friends or relatives houses. This generation has lived through events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the challenger disaster, energy crisis, stock market decline and the rise of the personal

computer. For Generation X, education is seen as a means to an end, they like structure and direction. Generation X is time conscious, they do not like to waste their time and are the first generation to demand a work-life balance. They are also able to work smarter but not harder [4]; this could be due to learning from previous generations and the development of processes and technology. They are a very independent generation; preferring to manage their own time and work without supervision and without being micro-managed. They can multi-task and enjoy individual projects meaning they like to be told what to do but not how to do it. They are loyal to their careers and employers. They like rewards and gratification. Technology has developed during their lifetimes and this generation are technology literate. Similar to Baby Boomers, family is important. This generation have saved money and can live comfortably. Generation comprise 40% of the workforce [4].

Generation Y (1981- 1994)

Over the years there has been increased research on Generation Y, otherwise known as Millennials. This generation has lived through the 2008 recession, 9/11, Iraq War, the death of Princess Diana, Hurricane Katrina and the Indian Ocean Tsunami. For Millennials, technology is developing fast, and is exciting. The first social media site called Six Degrees was created in 1997. This was then followed by instant messengers such as AOL, Yahoo and MSN. In 2003 Myspace was launched, followed by Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, Twitter in 2006 and Tumblr in 2007. There was then a three-year gap until Instagram was created in 2010 and Snapchat in 2011. Generation Y are protected by their Baby Boomer parents and as a result are very family orientated. They are more likely to take time off from work for travel reasons [10]. This generation is ambitious and have higher career expectations, however, they are not necessarily company loyal. They have been told they could be whatever they want to be and achieve whatever they want to, but then feel disappointment when that goal is not met instantly. They need to be supported by mentors, managers and others.

Generation Y likes to have a clear, structured career development and progression plan. They need to have frequent recognition. If needs are not met, they will change jobs. They like to have a sense of community and wish to work with you as opposed to for you. They are very much a team player who are productive and efficient as long as the right tools are provided. This is the first generation who will more than likely rely on their parents for financial support; they stay at home for longer as they tend to have a good relationship with the family [4]. They want to travel but they also want a career, which can be difficult. They can be known to live

for the moment more than previous generations – they have not experienced high unemployment rates like other generations (e.g. the late 70s and early 90s). Generation Y are 35% of the workforce [4].

Generation Z (1995-2010)

The oldest of generation Z otherwise known as iGen and digital natives, are now twenty four and are starting to enter the workplace. This group of individuals have lived through the Haiti earthquake, first African-American president and the London Olympics. They do not recall a moment when the war on terror did not exist or national finances were not in the media. They celebrate diversity and individuality [11]. They have been brought up with more of an exposure to different cultures, same-sex couples and interracial families. In fact, media is the second largest activity Generation Z is exposed to, sleeping being the largest [12].

Whilst this generation has much in common with Millennials, research for this generation is still emerging. Education is more self-directed; but concentration spans are lower with a tendency to become bored easily. They are the first generation who will follow 'just in time learning'; learning styles are ad hoc and on demand. Information should be delivered rapidly and in short bursts [2]. Literature suggests that there should be a move from the traditional formal delivery approach to an interactive and visual approach [4]. They are the ultimate 'self-educators' with the ability to access knowledge and information instantly due to internet search engines and even YouTube. To put this in context- a study has highlighted that every 60 seconds 2.5 million pieces of content are shared on Facebook, 100,000 tweets are sent and 48 hours of YouTube video is created [13]. Technology is influencing everything, and they would like one device to access all, both in the workplace and at home. Manual methods of working is frustrating for them.

They believe there is no way like the new way and because of this they may not like the traditional work environment. Generation Z seem to be more attracted to leading others, which may cause issues with other generations. They expect the opportunity to be informed and have their responses acknowledged. This generation will be less well-off financially than their parents and will struggle living in an independent household. They can be perceived as independent, stubborn and always in a rush. This generation is now entering the workforce.

Recommendations for Radiography Managers

To foster a good working environment, it is recommended that colleagues recognise that different age groups may have a different approach, and this should be celebrated and harnessed. For those who line manage and lead teams, an awareness may help them select an appropriate approach to individual team members that maximises individual engagement, progression and retention.

One common characteristic is that all generations appreciate the recognition of achievements, but one difference being that the younger generations would like it instantly. Line managers may wish to consider the importance of regular one to one meetings, annual personal development reviews and assign mentors to all staff. High quality mentoring has also been recognised as an important factor for student retention [14].

It is important to continually promote excellent team work, millennials, especially do not like to work in isolation. This may not suit every generation however the mixture of one to one meetings and regular team meetings is important. Managers should seek to facilitate work-life balance wherever possible, although this can be challenging in modern 24/7 imaging and radiotherapy departments with extended day working. This may include developing flexible working arrangements for all staff, not just those with carer responsibilities, or offering career breaks as these can increase job satisfaction and reduce turnover.

Radiography departments may wish to consider the design, development and delivery of local preceptorship programmes for newly qualified radiographers. Preceptorship is about providing support and guidance enabling 'new registrants' to make the transition from student to accountable practitioner [15]. Preceptorship programmes have specifically been highlighted as a key element of RePAIR. This Health Education England led project, seeks to address the Department of Health & Social Care's Mandate to 'reduce avoidable attrition from pre-registration programmes' in the four fields of nursing, midwifery and therapeutic radiography [6]. This project has sought to better understand the factors affecting retention and to develop a tool kit to address challenges at four key stages: pre-enrolment; duration of the course; transition to practice; early clinical career. The Student Leadership Programme run by The Council of Deans, is an example of supporting Generation Z as they seem more attracted to leadership [16].

Finally, managers may wish to review local formal career progression routes for those already in post through promoting options for CPD and giving a purpose for studying. One example of this is the diagnostic career framework developed in North West London [17]. The framework

is based on the Society and College of Radiographers Education and Career Framework [18] and has been developed in collaboration with all the NHS trusts in North West London and Health Education England (HEE). Within this offering, radiographers have an opportunity to design their own training, take control of how their career develops, and there will be greater consistency in skills and roles across trusts in NW London [17]. Further developing national opportunities include the apprenticeship agenda for post-registration candidates such as Advanced Clinical Practitioner, Ultrasonography and Mammography [19].

Recommendations for Radiography Educators

Generation Z are constantly connected to the world as the first totally internet generation, therefore traditional lecturers may not be the best approach. Concentration spans are shorter, and information should be delivered rapidly and in short bursts [20]. Breaking up lecturers with activities is one way to achieve this, as is simulation activities followed by problem-based learning activities [21]. This might include the use of audience response systems or gamification of activities. Ensure on-line reading lists are limited to the necessary information. A reading list which have 10 textbooks, 15 full journals and 25 articles to read within a week is not realistic. Educators can also make small changes to their communication strategies, such as giving an informative out of office message, ensuring return dates and alternative contacts are clearly stated.

Recommendations in education for Generation Z include using mobile technology and apps. The use of YouTube can be extremely helpful for Generation Z, alongside creating video content for learning purposes [11]. Collaboration through social sites such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs and online discussion groups should be encouraged. As a globally connected generation, Generation Z may consider participating in tweet chats- of note is the monthly international MedRadJclub [22]. This allows learners to connect with individuals at all levels of the radiography profession and provides a useful learning activity [23]. However, the use of social media needs to be carefully balanced, as it has been suggested that social media may increase the risk for mental health issues including isolation, depression and anxiety [24]. It is important to ensure we encourage healthy behaviours, help staff to recognise changes in students and promoting wellbeing services regularly. Furthermore, this generation will potentially blur work priorities and professional boundaries [4]. This proposes new challenges on defining what "professionalism" in radiography is [25]. Hence teaching staff should emphasise the expectation of patient confidentiality with students and make sure they are aware of guidelines and reasons why they should not post any patient information on social media [11].

Conclusion

Diversity in the modern workplace can take many forms, and age is but one component of this. Whilst it is important that we better understand those entering into their first-posts it is also important to recognise and celebrate all age ranges within the radiography workforce, to ensure all generations work well together in a team. This is important in the recruitment and retention of staff in a modern health service provision- NHS or private sector. As highlighted in this paper, reliable and valid research into this type of diversity is still ongoing especially in the field of allied health professions. Generation Z have arrived and are entering a clinical workplace near you.

CPD NOW PLANNED PATHWAYS

1. Consider local education policies and how they ensure an inclusive learning environment for all age groups within your local practice placement area.

2. Reflect on the potential impact of generational differences and generational strengths on team working. Consider how good team working strategies can be developed.

3. Read the RePAIR resources to explore alternative methods to improve attrition and retention within radiography.