Advisory consultations for PhD Candidates within the confidential setting of the Graduate School

Kirsten Douma, PhD | 22st of March 2019

The AMC Graduate School

1706 AMC PhD candidates

Gender
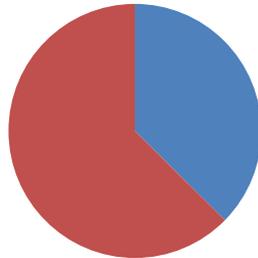
- Male
- Female

MD versus Research trainee
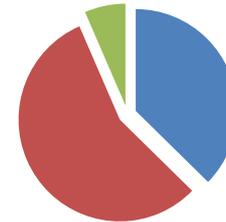
- MD
- OIO
- Other

PhD Candidate Support

- Peer to Peer Group Coaching
- Support guide
- APROVE: the social and professional network for AMC PhD Candidates
- Monitoring:
  - At start: individual Training and Supervision Agreement
  - Halfway: PhD Track Support
- Individual confidential consultations with the PhD Track Advisor

Increase in consultations

	2016	2017	2018
Total number	32	55	129
Number of PhD candidates	23	30	63
Mean number of consultations per PhD candidate	1.4	1.8	2.0

Explanation of increase

- Increase of number of PhD candidates
- Attention for burn-out in scientific world of Dutch media
- Symposium on work-related stress in 2017
- Promoting the PhD candidate advisor

Policy targets

- Which themes are discussed with the PhD Candidate Advisor?
- What help can be offered by the AMC Graduate School?

Method

- Consultation report
- Inclusion: all completed advice trajectories between 2016-2018 (n=100)
- Qualitative analyses using MAXQDA software
- Identify themes based on the literature and on the data

Themes

Themes	Subthemes	Frequency
Problems with supervision	19	177
Personal factors	9	78
Interference between work and private life	8	55
Feelings of incompetence	9	53
Work pressure	3	34
Lack of social support	2	24
Performance pressure	4	16
Appointment	8	14
Practical research problems	6	11
Practical supervision problems	3	9
Negative career perspective	1	2
Other	6	24

Problems with supervision
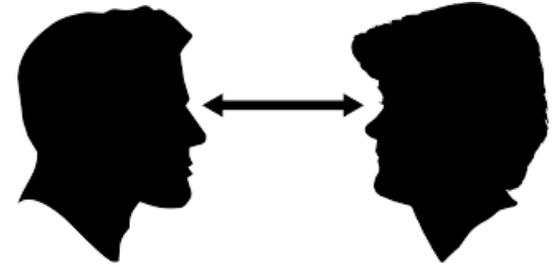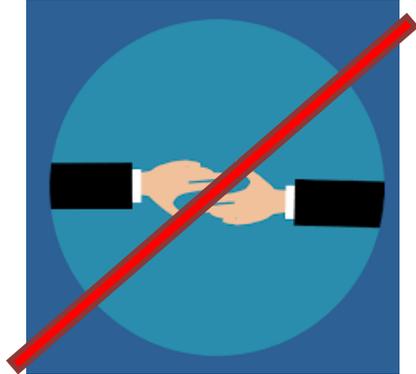
Personal factors
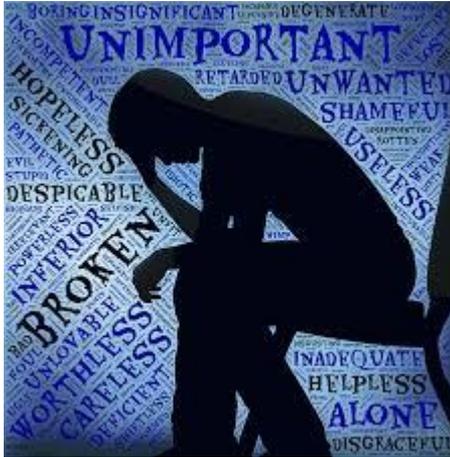
Interference work and private life

Feelings of incompetence

Work pressure

Progress

		Mean duration in months	Mean duration in years
Still working on PhD	67	n/a	n/a
Completed PhD	10	58.5	4.88
Stopped PhD	20	20.5	1.71

	2016	2017	2018	total
Mean duration at consultation, in months	26.67	21.79	21.64	22.93

Conclusion (1/2)

- Lack of time and lack of overview by supervisors
- Personal problems correlate with problems mentioned in other themes
- However, not all PhD candidates with other problems have personal problems
- Work overload is the norm

Conclusion (2/2)

- Need for structured supervision:
  - Work plan
  - Communication
  - Knowledge and time
- Assertiveness training
- Low threshold psychological support is needed
- PhD supervisors should be more aware of the influence of private matters on the work setting
- Tools needed to improve the work culture and to signal burn-out
- PhD candidates should have clear view at the start of what research entails

Discussion

- Biased?
- Monitoring: lack of individual Training and Supervision agreement or PhD Track Support are red flags
- Responsibility of the supervisors and institute

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