

A collaborative coaching approach to practice learning and placement expansion in gastroenterology

Practice learning is an essential part of pre-registration nursing education, and the number of placements needs to be expanded to keep up with demand, including in NHS gastroenterology services. This potential could be reached with a collaborative coaching approach, with groups of up to six students in each specialist area working together, supported by assessors using a coaching strategy.

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For nursing students, learning in practice is essential to develop the skills and knowledge needed for registration. Therefore, practice learning is typically an extensive component of pre-registration nursing education programmes. After all, the strength of the future nursing workforce depends on a continuous flow of newly registered nurses from the nursing education pipeline (International Council of Nurses, 2021). However, the number of nursing student placements is often limited.

Nursing students could find many valuable opportunities for practice learning in NHS gastroenterology services. Students can learn from clinical nurse specialists, research nurses and other members of the multidisciplinary team, whether based in surgical wards, gastroenterology clinics or endoscopy units. There is much expertise in nursing services outside the traditional ward placement that can hugely benefit a student's learning experience. However, at present, this potential is often not fully understood or utilised. The number of placements in gastroenterology tends to be unnecessarily limited. Expanding pre-registration programmes in these services could expose students to a wider range of quality learning opportunities, while

allowing nurses to make full use of their knowledge and skills in providing them.

This article argues that gastroenterology services hold considerable potential for placement expansion, and this potential can be reached by adopting a collaborative coaching approach to practice learning.

Challenges

To optimise practice learning and enhance student support, it is vital to understand and overcome the many challenges to creating a positive learning environment (Faithfull-Byrne et al, 2017; Grealish et al, 2018). These include busy acute care areas, staffing shortages and variations in skill mixes (Henderson et al, 2010). In practice, it can be difficult to provide sufficient staff to assess and supervise students (Grealish et al, 2018). Then, the assessor's preparation, communication motivation and behaviour all influence the experiences of students on placement (Henderson et al, 2010; Materne et al, 2017; Perry et al, 2018). A report on pre-registration nurse education (Willis, 2012), commissioned by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), identified several areas of practice learning that needed improvement and recognised the difficulty of finding quality, supportive placements

for large numbers of students (Grealish et al, 2018).

Responsibilities

Students on practice placement are entitled to receive high-quality learning, support and supervision. Supervisors and assessors need to meet the responsibilities of their role set out in the NMC (2019) standards. However, the pandemic may have made it much more difficult for providers to support students in large numbers, especially those who are also working with reduced workforces and rapidly changing services. This also may have made it more challenging for educational institutions and their practice partners running NMC-approved programmes to meet all aspects of the standards framework for pre-registration 'future nurse' education (NMC, 2019b).

How clinical learning can be enhanced is a consideration for all providers of nursing programmes. Equally, practice partners share the responsibility of supporting student learning. The drive to enhance learning experiences in practice is a shared objective for all who intend to grow the future healthcare workforce. To help overcome some of the challenges of practice learning, those responsible

for pre-registration nursing student placements in gastroenterology could adopt a collaborative coaching approach.

Collaboration

The collaborative aspect of this approach involves placing groups of between three and six students in each specialist clinical learning area, which may have traditionally taken only one or two students at a time. These groups should contain a mix of first-, second- and third-year students. Meanwhile, the base unit of the practice learning site is hosted in the gastroenterology wards. These expanded groups increase opportunities for collaboration between students. What is more, they significantly increase each service's capacity for placement opportunities, allowing ward allocation to be doubled or tripled.

Smaller groups of two or three students can be allocated to each specialist nurse. This can be achieved by alternating sessions with the nurse and related study time between mornings and afternoons. Working with research nurses and in project groups can be valuable learning opportunities for students. Students undertaking this collaborative approach have reported enhanced peer support and teamwork that have helped them develop their clinical skills (Hill et al, 2020).

Coaching

The coaching aspect requires the practice assessors to adopt a coaching style of supervision. Coaching is a developmental learning strategy that aims to help the learner fulfil their full potential (Faithfull-Byrne et al, 2017). In practice, this may involve role modelling, guiding and supporting nursing students to deliver care, identify solutions to problems and collaborate with one another, while

promoting professional development of nursing knowledge and skills (Beecroft et al, 2006; Narayanasamy and Penney, 2014; Faithfull-Byrne et al, 2017; Hill et al, 2020). Coaching is a powerful tool that has been shown to enhance clinical education (Clarke et al, 2018; Hill et al, 2020) and even facilitate the highest form of learning (Narayanasamy and Penney, 2014). Students in coaching programmes have reported increases in their confidence, levels of responsibility and capacity for leadership (Hill et al, 2020).

Opportunities

The collaborative coaching approach to practice learning is increasing in popularity (Faithfull-Byrne et al, 2017), and its many benefits have been firmly established (Hill et al, 2020). These approaches have been found to increase the likelihood of a student making the transition to registered practitioner (Hill et al, 2020), better preparing them for practice as a registrant.

Applying this collaborative coaching approach to practice learning in gastroenterology services would liberate their placement capacity and thus maximise learning opportunities for pre-registration nursing students. Moreover, gastroenterology services that provide more nursing students with positive experiences on placement will encourage those nurses to return to the specialism after they are qualified, enhancing opportunities for recruitment. **GN**

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