Welcome to the Autumn edition of the Department of Practice Learning newsletter.

Placement and work based learning standards

Walter Riggans, Quality Support Manager introduces the Faculty of Health’s quality standards for practical placements

In June 2010, the Centre for Academic Quality and Governance and the Department of Practice Learning in the Faculty of Health prepared a comprehensive document that sets out the commitment of the Faculty to achieving the highest standards in placement learning. The aim is to ensure effective learning opportunities for students, in which not only are the intended learning outcomes clearly defined, but where the responsibilities of the University, practice partners and students are made explicit.

The purpose of these 21 standards is to:

- ensure that programme teams have appropriate procedures in place to provide placement and work based learning of high quality
- clarify the responsibilities and rights of the various parties involved in placement and work based learning
- detail the threshold standards for placement and work based learning
- reduce claims of material error against placements
- comply with the standards and requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory bodies
- comply with QAA precepts for placement and work based learning
- comply with ECQ indicators for placement and work based learning

Practice partners are encouraged to access this document and suggest any enhancement to the standards.
Getting the balance right

Two conflicting reports are currently informing the mentoring and assessment of student nurses. In this edition of the DPL Newsletter we will examine both of these issues and consider their implications for mentoring and assessing student nurses.

Many student nurses leave courses before they have completed them. The Department of Health has identified that this is a costly waste and has set a national standard that we should lose no more than 13 per cent of students before they register as nurses.


We do not change fail grades to passes

We believe that the majority of mentors who fail a student in practice do this to protect the public from unsafe practice. This is reassuring to the public and to employers of registered nurses. We want to assure all mentors that we take your assessment of students’ practical ability seriously and that we do not overturn the practical assessment results that you give. We are concerned here, at Birmingham City University, that some mentors seem to believe that we do overturn their decisions to fail student nurses when this is not the case. This belief seems to come mainly from mentors seeing students returning to practice settings for further placements. The following explanation of why students go out in practice again after a failed placement might help to reduce mentors concerns that their decisions are being overturned.

Reason 1 - The student is being assessed on different learning outcomes to the ones they failed with you.

Students undertake two or three placements each year and in each placement they are assessed against different criteria. The student may now be in a placement being assessed on other elements of the course. By the end of the academic year all the learning outcomes will have been assessed and we will know which ones the student has been successful in and which they need to reattempt.

Reason 2 - The student is undertaking a second attempt of the learning outcomes they failed with you.

At the end of the academic year students are given a second attempt to pass any outstanding practical learning outcomes. You may see a student nurse on a practical placement undertaking a second attempt at learning outcomes they did not pass when you were their mentor.

This year the Nursing Times identified that 37 per cent of mentors still don’t fail students when they demonstrate poor practical ability. Mentors often believe that universities will overturn their decisions.

Reason 3 - The student made a material error claim which was upheld.

Students have the right to make a material error claim if they feel the conduct of the assessment did not follow procedure. The main reason material error claims are upheld is because mid-point interviews are done late or not recorded correctly. This means the student does not have enough time to improve after being told about any weaknesses. If the student does have a material error claim upheld we do not change the student’s grade to a pass. The student is given another placement and is assessed as though this was a first attempt. This ensures the student only passes if they can demonstrate to a mentor that their practice is of the required standard.

Reason 4 - The student was referred via the fitness to practice mechanism not via assessment of learning outcomes.

If you tell us about a student using this mechanism you have not failed the student in practice on any learning outcomes. The fitness to practice mechanism is separate and different to assessing the student on learning outcomes. Based on the outcome of the fitness to practice procedure at the University a student may or may not be allowed to continue on the course. Students who continue on the course will be seen in practice again but conditions may be applied in the same way as the NMC can apply conditions in the case of registered nurses.

Are you a toxic mentor?

We all have the odd bad day where we might be a bit grumpy or less helpful than usual but if you find you are consistently behaving in the ways listed below students might consider you to be a toxic mentor. A range of disabling mentor types have been identified by Darling (1986).

A galaxy of toxic mentors

**Dumpers**
Mentors who ensure they are not available to students
Mentors who throw students into new roles and leave them to sink or swim
Mentors who only give students the jobs they don’t want to do themselves

**Blocker**
Mentors who avoid meeting students’ needs by:
• Refusing their requests
• Withholding information
• Over-supervising by hovering

**Destroyers**
Mentors who destroy students’ self esteem by:
• making subtle attacks to undermine the students’ confidence
• verbal attacks and arguments
• constant put downs
• belittling questions

People might behave as toxic mentors for a number of reasons:
• They had a bad experience as a learner and now pass this on to students
• They do not feel up to the role and are intimidated
• They do not understand how they come across to others and lack self awareness.

Significant numbers of student nurses leave courses as a result of bad practical experiences. Being a good mentor can have a very positive effect on keeping students motivated and interested so that they continue on their course and register as a nurse. Being a good mentor can help ensure that money spent on training student nurses is not wasted.
Are you an enabling mentor?

We have many excellent mentors who have a very positive approach to student nurses. Good mentors are identified by Fawcett (2002) as having the following qualities:

**Patience**
- Allows enough time for a student to complete a task
- Does not take over a task because it is easier
- Gives the student independence

**Enthusiasm**
- Gives positive productive guidance
- Keen to give new experiences
- Invests time and energy into the student
- Gives praise for success

**Knowledge**
- Encompassing a wide variety of areas
- Gives the student a sense of being in control
- Gives the student a sense of belonging by providing insider information

**Sense of humour**
- Is able to laugh at self and own mistakes
- Relieves stress for the student (when used appropriately)
- Laughs with but never at the student

**Respect of peers**
- Gained by being willing to:
  - share success
  - learn and change
  - be flexible and open minded
  - use resources fairly.

A mentor who has a positive attitude will help a student to develop his or her own style of nursing by offering knowledge and support. A mentor has a much stronger impact upon a student than just being a teacher of facts or skills. Mutual respect and professional values are the cornerstones of this relationship and can encourage and foster the next generation of registered nurses.

**References**


What our students say about good mentors

The number of Birmingham City University students recommending their mentors for excellence awards is increasing. There is a noticeable trend that the students who take the trouble to do this praise their mentors for rigorously testing their knowledge whilst on placement. Many indicate they like the fact that they are being asked the theory behind their care and asked to look up things for the next shift. This activity is obviously being positively perceived as turning a shift into a learning experience.

Assessors of excellence

Congratulations and thank you to our latest assessors of excellence. All have been nominated by students or colleagues using a form available on the DPL website.

Loretta Parris  Ophthalmic Inpatients City SWBH
Julie Thomas  District Nursing Team B Warwick House
Nahide Emin Falk  District Nursing Team B Warwick House
Claire Fallon  Day Case Unit Good Hope Hospital HEFT
Jane Holland  Day Case Unit Good Hope Hospital HEFT
Paula McLaughlin  Ward 9 Good Hope Hospital HEFT
Emma Cowley  A&E Good Hope Hospital HEFT
Sharron Roadknight  John Black Day Hospital
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E: DPL.sickline@bcu.ac.uk

University switchboard
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Ask the library
http://library.bcu.ac.uk/contactus.htm