

Enhancing communication and support with nursing and midwifery students – examples of good practice from across Scotland

Following the RAPOG meeting on Tuesday 2nd February 2020 a request was made to the National Strategic Group for Practice Learning to share any examples of good practice initiated by universities and practice learning partners to:

1. Ensure students are kept abreast of developments during this period of the COVID-19 pandemic
2. Enhance students' wellbeing.

Across the country nursing and midwifery students are currently engaging in either a theoretical module or undertaking a learning experiences in practice. The following case studies (which have been anonymised) give a picture of just some of the examples of strategies that are being employed to enhance communication and support for students in either of these contexts.

Examples of good practice from the universities

We are meeting with all year group class representatives fortnightly to ensure communication is clear and transparent and manage any issues- the class representatives in turn are liaising with their year groups. Regular, all school, written communication from the senior team is happening as well. We also have a range of support services to support students wellbeing hosted by the university and our students are also accessing services hosted by the boards when on placement. Our personal tutors are also hosting regular meetings with their students to try and offer support.

We have been holding regular drop-ins virtually for students. Also delivering briefing sessions before going to placement. Central communications are going out on updates and support services available for our students.

We have weekly drop in sessions for students with Year Leads, placement reflection meetings with academic assessors and weekly programme updates.

Examples of good practice from the universities continued...

To support nursing students, we have increased the contact using several formats. Fortnightly 'Collaborate Sessions' for different cohorts are led by The Dean and attended by Senior Staff and the Programme Management Team. This allows each cohort to be updated on any recent local or national discussions/decisions that will affect them. This information is also given via email and the Advisors of Studies, but the 'Collaborate Sessions' allow live questioning and any queries to be responded to at the time.

There are also fortnightly 'Advisor of Studies' meetings for each learning team - this is for formal communication and pastoral and academic support. A community meeting place is created if time allows, so the students are given the freedom to speak to each other without the Advisor of Studies. This was in response to nursing students feeling isolated from their peers.

There are weekly 'Advisor of Studies drop-in' sessions for the learning teams created through a Teams invitation. This is informal and voluntary and set at a time (lunchtime) to minimise disruption if in practice.

Half of the 2018 cohort are in the simulated practice experience at present and they are having weekly small group meetings with a Practice Supervisor - the feedback about this has been very positive.

In our partner health boards, one of the boards has a 'Welcome session' for all students in acute and community hospital placements. They are also due to commence weekly Microsoft Teams drop-ins for all students on placement every Friday. Our other partner health board are due to begin 'Welcome' introduction sessions which will cover wellbeing, as well as, other topics for students.

Examples of good practice from practice placement providers

Our NHS Board has launched Executive NMAHP Director virtual forums for student nurses and midwives to listen to their concerns e.g. supernumerary status. The forums will run quarterly and themes will be analysed and shared with HEI colleagues so we can jointly look at ways to further enhance support for students.

Examples of good practice from practice placement providers continued...

Our Practice Education team has continued to offer a suite of flexible options for student support during placement at this challenging time. In our acute areas, Practice Education staff are visiting placement areas on a regular basis to offer pastoral support. Teams are also offering practical support to extremely busy clinical areas such as supporting staff to complete the PAD and working in practice with students. In order to reduce unnecessary footfall to clinical areas, we have utilised technology, with many areas offering 'Welcome' sessions and ongoing support via MS Teams, email and the telephone. We ensure that students have access to the same board wide information regarding COVID-19 management, testing, vaccinations and updates as our permanent workforce.

We have made a concerted effort to pull together key information regarding student placements from various sources into easy to read newsletters for Practice Supervisors and Practice Assessors. We offer informal support for placement areas, through our existing communication channels, liaising with placement areas to reassure staff that although the placement is different, there is still valuable learning and linking practice examples to the platforms within the new standards. We have also supported staff to include students in virtual consultations including utilising 'Near Me'.

There is the requirement to be responsive to emergency capacity issues; maintaining student welfare and practice learning for students, for example when areas have had to close due to COVID-19 outbreaks. Our HEI colleagues have developed activities for students to undertake while self-isolating when well following localised outbreaks. Practice Education have supported this process by marking these activities and providing feedback to students and placement areas.

We are working in partnership with our HEI practice education colleagues who are offering bi-weekly virtual support sessions for students currently on placement. We continue to help those who require additional support through the facilitation of Practice Learning Support Protocols. We continue to work in collaboration with our HEI colleagues to optimise student learning wherever possible.