



The challenge of clinical placement

INMO student and new graduate officer, Neal Donohue advises students on what they need to know ahead of starting a clinical placement

ONE of the effects of understaffing in the health services is that clinical placement experiences have the potential to quell the enthusiasm of another generation of dedicated and passionate student nurses and midwives, driving them towards better pay and conditions overseas at the end of their training. Equally concerning is the fact that many students cite inadequate support and supervision as reasons for failing placement. Sometimes, the failure of a student can be directly associated with the failure of the health service.

Some 76% of respondents to the INMO's Nursing and Midwifery Internship Survey 2018 said that they did not find adequate staffing levels in the workplace to support their learning. According to the Nursing and Midwifery Registration Programmes Standards and Requirements, as set out by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI), there should be a minimum of one clinical placement co-ordinator (CPC) to 30 student nurses and one CPC to 15 midwifery students. National figures show the ratio of CPCs to students is 1:52, falling desperately short of minimum NMBI standards, which is concerning for students.

Standards

From the moment you commence your training you must comply with the NMBI standards or you risk failing. Familiarise yourself with these standards, requirements and guidelines. These can be found at: www.nmbi.ie/Home

Every moment you are on placement you are being assessed. Your behaviour and attitude are as important as your capacity to learn and your ability to develop new skills. It is important to act in a professional manner. Read the NMBI Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics at www.nmbi.ie/Standards-Guidance/Code

Inadequate staffing levels limit staff nurses/midwives time to teach you. If you

do not have a preceptor and you believe there are not enough CPCs while on placement you should email the CNM/CMM firstly and ask for this to be addressed. If your learning is not adequately supported in the workplace you must notify the Higher Education Institution (HEI) and keep a diary of days when you do not have a preceptor.

The NMBI Nurse Registration Programmes Standards and Requirements 2.5.2 clearly states that "Practice experience must be gained under the supervision of appropriately prepared preceptors and with levels of nursing staff and resources for the safe delivery of nursing care to those using the service." (Adapted from Article 23, Council Directive 2013/55/EU) If appropriate preceptors and appropriate levels of nursing/midwifery staff are not in place then this is not an appropriate placement for students. You should bring this to the attention of the HEI immediately.

Redeployment of students/interns is not acceptable. Your learning must be supported and supervised by a preceptor in accordance with NMBI standards and requirements. Your allocations officer has tailored your placements to accommodate your learning needs, therefore you may not be redeployed elsewhere. Although interns are employees, the same principle applies.

Scope of practice

It is important to work within your scope of practice. What you did not know yesterday you will be expected to know tomorrow. On speciality placements you will have limited ability to engage in clinical skills, but you must show evidence that you are learning.

All students, including interns are entitled to four hours protected reflective time. Use the protected reflective time wisely. It offers opportunity to reflect on clinical experience and study further to enhance your experiential learning.

Action plan

If you are not achieving the required standards on clinical placement you will be given an action plan. If you do not agree with your preceptor's assessment, then you should clearly state this in writing and ask for support from your CPC. If you are given an action plan, then it is important to understand the steps you must take to pass the placement.

Each HEI will have a policy relating to the progression of student nurses and midwives. This policy outlines the procedure following a failed placement. There are many reasons students may fail a placement, however, you may have grounds to appeal. Common reasons cited by students for poor performance are ill health, or tiredness due to working part-time jobs.

These may seem like reasonable arguments but the protection of the patient or service user is considered paramount by the NMBI. As regulated professionals nurses and midwives must make judgements regarding their ability to practice. If you, as a student feel that you are not able to practice safely then it is better to communicate this to your CPC and take some time off rather than fail in your professional responsibility.

Evaluations

Students must complete evaluation forms after every placement accurately and honestly. Many students report feeling uncomfortable documenting negative experiences for fear of reprisal. Anonymity must be maintained if these documents are to be completed truthfully, in the interest of providing better supports in the future. Evaluation forms provide an evidence base for the HEI and associate healthcare provider to examine the effectiveness of the structures that are in place.

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