



Managing costs on placement

INMO student and new graduate officer, Neal Donohue, looks at the cost of living for students on clinical placement and the various allowances available

AT THIS stage in the academic year, student nurses and midwives all over the country have started clinical placements and are experiencing the highs and lows of working in healthcare. Nursing and midwifery can be extremely rewarding professions. I remember my very first placement as a student. I was inspired by the knowledge and skill of the staff who took the time to teach and instruct me. Their knowledge and expertise seemed to be the glue that held the whole system together.

While students learn to navigate the complexities of professional relationships and structures within the health service and learn to understand the concepts of professional accountability and responsibility, they go through a personal growth where their coping mechanisms are challenged in a way that other students are not. They do this while developing a comprehensive knowledge base and clinical skills, along with dealing with the pressures of exams and assignments.

Like all students they also must manage their expenses related to living and education, but there are far higher expenses while attending clinical placements, especially in relation to accommodation and travel.

Costs

In 2017 we saw another year of increases in the cost of rental accommodation. The market shows that there is greater demand in urban areas, which increases the competition for renting. The latest figures in the **Daft.ie** rental report for the final quarter of 2017 show that on average, listed rents increased by 10.4% in 2017. In 2016 there was an increase of 13.5%, in 2015 an increase of 9% and in 2014 an increase of 10.7%.

This is particularly concerning for nurses and midwives, since most hospitals are based in urban areas. Travelling to work or placement can be difficult as public transport does not always cater well for the unsociable hours worked by healthcare professionals. Nurses and midwives are often dependent on finding accommodation close to their place of work.

The cost of transport has also increased substantially in recent years. Since 2007 there has been a significant reduction in national bus and rail services especially in rural areas, while the cost of motor insurance has increased. In 2017 alone, there was an increase in fares on 74% of national transport routes.

The National Student Housing Survey 2017 was carried out by the Union of Students in Ireland on the experiences of third-level students in Ireland. It is worrying that this report highlights the relationship between high accommodation costs and increased student drop-out rates. A total of 89% of the respondents in this study report being at risk of physical and mental health deterioration due to unsuitable accommodation. With such high expenses, student nurses and midwives need to be aware of the allowances available to them.

Allowances

Nursing and midwifery students in first to third year may claim allowances while on clinical placement. These allowances are outlined in HSE HR Circular 9/2004 which states: "A student on the pre-registration nursing degree programme is entitled to an accommodation allowance up to but not exceeding €50.79 weekly for the duration of the placement where it is necessary for the student to obtain accommodation away from his/her normal place of residence".

This allowance is intended as a contribution towards the cost of clinical placement and is not intended to meet the full cost of accommodation. The **Daft.ie** rental report for 2017 shows an average monthly rent of €632 for Dublin city centre. Is the accommodation allowance sufficient to support students in 2018?

According to the Higher Education Authority's Eurostudent Survey VI 2016, the overall average income for full time students was €621, while average monthly expenditure of full-time students on living costs was €718. These figures do not take into account the costs of education, and since nursing and midwifery students have added costs associated with clinical placements we can expect the deficit to be much higher.

Travel

Travel costs for clinical placement may also be refunded as outlined in HSE HR Circular 9/2004. Allowances may be claimed by students when they provide receipts to the student allocations liaison officer in the health service.

Student nurses and midwives are in a more precarious situation than other students because they attend clinical placements, so it is necessary to provide additional financial supports. At a time where there is a recruitment and retention crisis for nurses and midwives we need to re-examine the supports available to students to assist them on their path to registration. All eligible student nurses and midwives should avail of these allowances.

If you have any questions regarding the accommodation and travel allowances, available, please contact me via the details listed below.

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