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6 The Planning and Development of an Education Framework for Practice Educators within Health and Social Care Professions

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Abstract

Providing quality placements for students in the hospital setting is an essential component of the BSc in Clinical Measurement Science degree programme at DIT. The practice educator (hospital supervisor) role involves mentoring and supervising students on placement. Prior to 2012 practice educators received no training to support this role. Current training involves one full day of generic education and a second half-day of discipline specific knowledge relating to projects, log books and assessments.

The aim of this research is to identify training needs for practice educators across the four disciplines and recommend an education framework to meet those needs. The proposed framework will be transferable to other degree programmes within DIT such as Biomedical Sciences, Human Nutrition and Dietetics, Optometry, Ophthalmic Dispensing and Social Care.

There are currently 41 sites offering clinical placements to the BSc in Clinical Measurement Science. In May 2016 the chief in each department was surveyed to gain an understanding of how placements were managed within the hospital setting. In all 38 of the 41 sites took part in the survey.

From the research it was clear that practice educators within Clinical Measurement Science have a desire for further knowledge and training to support their role. As the only education provider in the south of Ireland offering this degree programme it is incumbent on us to provide this post-graduate education. A 5 ECTS, level 9 module on practice education is currently under the review.

The implication of this research is great. Clinical physiology departments are understaffed and receive no additional resources for taking students on placement. Providing practice educators with on-going training and support will be critical to ensuring there will be enough placements in the future to meet the degree programme needs.

Keywords: *practice education; practice educator; clinical placements*

Background

The BSc in Clinical Measurement Science is a four-year honours degree programme with specialisation in four main disciplines, namely, Cardiology, Vascular, Respiratory and Neurophysiology Science.

Providing quality clinical placements for students of the BSc in Clinical Measurement Science at Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) is an essential component of their qualification. Students graduate with a major in either Cardiology, Vascular, Respiratory or Neurophysiology Science. Clinical placements ensure students graduate with a level of experience that supports their employment as basic grade clinical physiologists. Students undertake eight weeks placement in each of three out of four disciplines in Year 3 and 13 weeks in their chosen discipline in Year 4 of the degree programme.

I am employed as the Practice Education Coordinator (PEC) for the degree programme. The main role of the PEC is to link with the hospital departments and arrange, coordinate and manage clinical placements for students. As departments receive no additional funding or staffing resources to take students, organising clinical placements can be a difficult task.

The PEC invariably relies on the good will of the department manager. This good will approach is neither reliable nor sustainable. Practice Placement Educators, are experienced clinical physiologists but most lack any form of training in the delivery of education, which often leads to an unwillingness to accommodate students. Clinical tutors, with post graduate qualifications in teaching and learning, are employed by DIT on a half time basis to support the placements by providing tutorials, specialist lectures, pre placement lectures, log book and project guidance to students on placement. However as the posts are half time, on site visits are limited except when issues arise. Therefore providing ongoing training and education for practice educators in the delivery of education to our students is essential to enable them to develop their own teaching and learning skills.

Research Title

The Planning and Development of an Education Framework for Practice Educators within Health and Social Care Professions

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research is to identify training needs for practice educators across the four disciplines of Clinical Measurement Science, recommend an education framework to meet those needs, develop the programme within DIT and roll out to all practice educators within clinical physiology. The proposed framework will outline a staged, developmental approach to provide a continuum of learning for practice educators and will be transferrable to other degree programmes within DIT such as Biomedical Sciences, Human Nutrition and Dietetics, Optometry, Ophthalmic Dispensing and Social Care.

Drawing from a review of the literature and international examples of best practice, the development of an education framework for practice educators is proposed as offering a valuable contribution to the overall quality and safety in healthcare provision.

From the literature

Competency is identified as personal traits, characteristics or skills which can be shown to be directly linked to effective performance (Boyatzis, 1982).

From the literature, five areas of competency were identified:

- **Educational Competencies** – develop learning styles and models
- **Assessment/Evaluation Competencies** – encourage fair assessment, student learning and development
- **Professional Practice Competencies** – develop all practical skills of the student, reasoning skills, adhere to code of ethics, maintain own continuing professional development (CPD)
- **Supervision Competencies** – educate, mentor, identify learning goals
- **Management and Administration Competencies** – encourage effective induction, manage time effectively, implement quality improvement

There are many different tasks and roles required of practice educators to operate as competent mentors and supervisors and to respond to the varied needs of students. The *teacher as manager* model described by Romanini and Higgs (1991) outlines the three stages of clinical placement as:

- Preparation
- Implementation
- Evaluation

According to Romanini and Higgs (1991), practice educators have five roles when becoming learning programme managers. These are as the following:

- Task manager
- Group manager (if there is more than one student present)

- Individual development manager
- Environmental manager
- Overall programme manager

Other authors have expanded these roles to include those of role-model, colleague, teacher, evaluator, administrator, counsellor and researcher (McLeod et al. 1997).

Extensive work has been carried out by the Therapy Project Office since the publication of the report “Current and Future Supply and Demand Condition in the Labour Market for Certain Professional Therapists” (Bacon, 2001). On the strength of their work, other health and social care professions have received funding from the Health Service Executive (HSE) to employ Practice Education Coordinators. However, for many, the system still lacks structure. This research will endeavour to bring clinical physiology in line with the Therapy Professions Practice Education System.

Practice Education for the Therapy Profession

All therapy courses such as Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Therapy are providing practice education and training for practice educators who facilitate their students on placements. The majority of the therapy courses provide training as annual education days on practice education topics that are requested formally via feedback forms etc., or informally by the practice educators. Most of these courses are organised and run by the practice education co-ordinators in conjunction with the practice tutors and regional placement facilitators, and generally are run as uni-disciplinary courses for their own practice educators. Most therapy courses provide this annual training/education on a “first come first served” basis and also use this forum to identify any further practice educator education needs.

The topics covered in these courses change each year and there is no formal follow-on through the courses. Recently, courses have been changing this practice and some of the new therapy courses have had a different structure in place from the onset. They are aiming to run courses each year at both basic and intermediate/advanced level. The basic practice educator course would repeat common themes, whereas the topics on the intermediate/advanced one day course change to meet the needs of the more senior practice educators.

Basic and Advanced Practice Education CPD Courses	
Trinity College Dublin	Discipline Specific
University College Dublin	Discipline Specific
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	Discipline Specific
National University of Ireland Galway	Multidisciplinary
University College Cork	Discipline Specific
University of Limerick	Multidisciplinary
National University of Ireland Galway	
Accredited Practice Educator in Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Therapy	Two day single discipline workshop plus two modules from the faculty's multidisciplinary Masters in Advanced Healthcare
Certificate, PG Cert and Masters in Clinical Education	Open to all health and social care professionals
HSE Learning and Development Website	
Online training for practice educator	Available at www.hseland.ie Open to all health and social care professionals
UK	
PG Cert. in Practice Educators for Social Workers	Stage 1 – Enabling Work-Based Learning Stage 2 – Supervising a Learner in Practice

Figure 6.1: Overview of Available Courses

Practice Education Training for Clinical Measurement Science

Prior to 2012 no training was provided to practice educators taking our students on placement. Clinical tutors supported the role as much as possible. The first practice educator day was held in 2012 with large numbers attending. It coincided with the first employment of the practice education coordinator role for the degree programme. The next course was held in 2014 with approximately 30 delegates attending. It was provided again in January 2016 with 44 delegates and January 2017 with 56 delegates. This training involves one full day of generic training which includes talks on communication, supervision, effective feedback and reflective practice and other topics based on delegate feedback. A second half day is delivered which covers discipline specific training on log book, case study and projects requirement and clinical competency assessments.

Findings from this research will influence content for these events.

Methods

There are currently 41 sites offering clinical placements across the four disciplines to the BSc in Clinical Measurement Science: 16 Cardiology, 10 Respiratory, 8 Neurophysiology and 7 Vascular.

In May 2016, each department was surveyed to gain an understanding of how placements were managed within the hospital setting. Departments were notified in advance that all responses would form part of this research. As all responses were anonymous, no ethics approval was sought from DIT.

During the academic year September 2015 to August 2016, 30 third year students participated in three separate practice placements of eight weeks duration each (a total of 24 weeks per student) and 26 final year students participated in a 12 week long practice placement in their chosen discipline. Placement sites are predominantly in the greater Dublin area with some provided elsewhere around the country.

Findings and Discussion

Practice Educator/Student Ratio

Generally clinical measurement diagnostic departments with the exception of Cardiology and one or two larger Respiratory departments have low staffing compliments and this does not support 1:1 supervision. From the 41 sites surveyed, all departments adopted a shared model of supervision with either the chief or senior appointed staff member as the main supervisor responsible for weekly supervision meetings, sign off for log books and project supervision in combination with staff rotation for general supervision. The exception was fourth year projects which were supervised by the chief physiologist in each site.

Knowledge Skills and Support for Practice Educators

The 41 sites currently taking students were asked to outline what knowledge, skills and support they required to assist them in their role as practice educator. The response was divided between knowledge and support. Most departments required annual education days, discipline specific training, clear guidelines and feedback on how their department is doing. Specific requests included, train the trainer classes, project guidelines, research/statistics training, reflective practice and leadership skills, CPD points, protected learning time, and the provision of post graduate education. Others, focused on support, to involve HSE/DIT resources to support departments taking students in the form of additional senior staff and more hands on support from clinical tutors.

Accredited Practice Placement Educator

From the 41 sites surveyed, 38 responses were received. In all 23 indicated they would welcome the opportunity to become an accredited practice educator, a further nine indicated that while they would not wish to avail of this opportunity they considered it important and would appoint a senior member of staff to become accredited. Nine of those surveyed had not attended any practice education training and two stated they were not interested in attending any formal training on practice education; four did not respond to that question. From the feedback received 18 had attended the practice education day in 2016 and a further nine had attended the practice education day in the past.

New Developments Based on Research Findings

Over the past months, in response to the survey, a new practice education handbook has been developed and distributed to departments. In addition a reflective practice and writing handbook has also been developed and distributed. The 2017 event was held on 13th and 14th January. Following feedback and research findings this year's event was extended and improved to include more workshops, information on statistics, discipline specific training on log books and case studies, as well as a meet and greet session with DIT joint supervisors of final year projects. An external facilitator was employed to deliver a 90 minute session on Time Management.

Evaluation and Conclusion

From the research findings, it is clear that practice educators within Clinical Measurement Science have a desire for further knowledge and training to support their role. Most would like the opportunity to develop their skills to become accredited practice educators. Others within the departments who may not directly supervise students still have a need to develop understanding of the role of practice educator, and for those staff, undertaking the HSE learning and development online practice education modules may be sufficient. The CPD practice educator training now offered annually should be attended by practice educators responsible for direct student supervision. As 32 of the 41 sites surveyed expressed a desire to achieve proficiency in the delivery of practice education further post graduate education should be made available to meet those needs. A post graduate 5 ECTS module on practice education is currently under review.

One of the aims of this project was to provide education for practice educators that would be transferrable to other health and social care professions within DIT. It is clear that both the online training and annual CPD events all contain generic information that would fit this criteria. The same principle would apply to the post graduate 5 ECTS credit module on practice education. As for all health and social care professions, there will be a discipline specific element that will need to be made available to each discipline. Currently within DIT, Optometry, Biomedical Science and Nutrition and Dietetics provide annual CPD opportunities for their placement supervisors and from discussion would welcome the opportunity to have access to further post graduate education for their practice educators.

Recommendations for DIT

1. As an introduction to practice education, all departments taking students are encouraged to have all staff undertake the online practice education course through HSEland, the Health Service Executive's learning and development website. Topics include Education, Supervision, Assessment/Evaluation, Professional Development and Management/Administration
2. All departments taking students are requested to have the chief or appointed student supervisor attend the annual practice education day in DIT in January each year. Where more than one supervisor is in the department, the supervisors may rotate attendance.
3. Currently DIT has no formal accreditation process for choosing placement sites. Placements are sourced and managed by the practice education coordinator in consultation with the clinical tutors. Feedback from practice educators, clinical tutors and students during and post placements, are analysed to determine placement suitability. It is recommended that DIT should move towards accrediting practice placement sites.
4. To introduce an element of stability, it is recommended that DIT establish a memorandum of agreement with each department taking students. This would allow the Practice Education Coordinator to plan and arrange placements well in advance and allow students to source accommodation ahead of the usual college year rush. In practice, due to small staffing numbers and the absence of back fill for maternity and sick leave, this is not always practical. A very successful attempt was made this year when departments were surveyed in May to ask for a commitment to take students for the 2016/17 academic year. Some 38 of the 41 surveyed sites took part and to date only one site could not fulfil their agreement.

Proposed Future Work

1. In order to determine what competencies practice placement educators deem essential, desirable or not important a follow up survey will be distributed to all departments. Results from this survey will help to identify learning needs and content for the proposed new level nine practice education module. The module will be made available to other health and social care disciplines within DIT.
2. A practice education section for clinical measurement science will be developed on Webcourses and made available to each department taking students. This is currently in existence for Biomedical Sciences and an option for other health and social care groups.
3. The Department of Physics & Clinical & Optometric Sciences is currently developing a new website. A public, practice education information section will be included on this website.

Dissemination of Findings

- Results of this research were presented at the Lunchtime Teaching and Learning Session in DIT in October 2016
- Results of this research were presented to practice educators at the practice education event in DIT on 13th January 2017
- Results of this research will be presented at the next clinical measurement science team meeting in February.
- An abstract has been submitted for the International Practice Education Conference in Birmingham on 21st April.
- Results of this research will be presented at the Irish Institute of Clinical Measurement Science Conference in Athlone in May 2017.

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