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Working in Partnership to Deliver an Innovative Pre-Registration Nursing Programme

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Introduction

The Open University's newly validated work based pre-registration nursing programme is an innovative educational programme developed to offer flexible learning opportunities as well as widening access as recommended in both the Department of Health's report Making a Difference¹ and the UKCC's report Fitness for Practice². Aimed initially at Health Care Assistants, or their equivalent, who meet the professional body's minimum requirements for entry to nurse training, it is currently open to staff in England working in organisations that have agreed partnership arrangements with the Open University (OU). The partnership agreement sets out the respective roles and responsibilities of the OU and the employing agencies. The employers' responsibilities include selection and sponsorship of members of staff suitable for training, and support of these students by giving them study leave throughout the programme. The University's responsibilities include the provision of multi-media study materials for students, their tutors and practice mentors, tutorial support and access to Open Library, the OU's Library service for distance users.

Programme's educational philosophy, aims and objectives

The programme will be delivered using a combination of supported open learning (the OU's traditional system of distance learning), work-based learning, patient scenarios and face-to-face teaching. Work-based learning puts students at the centre of the curriculum design. The programme focuses on students' experiences within their practice. The open learning materials are designed to encourage students to reflect on their practice and to relate materials to their clinical experiences. As the students progress through the programme they are encouraged to question and to become critical practitioners, and will be encouraged to develop the skills necessary to apply evidence-based knowledge to inform their nursing care decisions.

The OU's School of Health and Social Welfare existing programmes and learning packs emphasise interprofessional care with a focus on the service user. These values will also be incorporated into the nursing programme with an emphasis on holistic, individualised user-sensitive care. Students will be encouraged to consider the whole person, not just the illness or condition that has led the person into a caring situation, and to consider how the personal values and attitudes of both the patient/client and health care professional are important factors in both the uptake of services and the delivery of care.

Access to library services and resources

As part of the contractual arrangement with employing organisations, the programme requires that students have access to a computer with an Internet link. The Internet will provide the students and tutors with access to the OU's Library service, Open Library.

Use of the computer is also compulsory for a number of the programme courses as students are exposed to a range of different uses of information communication technologies (ICT) as they progress. These include completing interactive exercises on CDROM, engaging with fellow students through a computer-mediated conference and communicating with their tutor by e-mail.

Open Library³ has been developed to provide a range of information resources relevant to OU courses. The importance of providing students with access to the nursing literature was acknowledged at the English National Board (ENB) Validation of the programme in October 2001 and the current collection of bibliographic databases and electronic journals is being developed to support the new nursing programme. Students will have access to the major bibliographic databases including CINAHL, BNI PLUS, COCHRANE, HMIC and MEDLINE and the University's collection of over 5,000 electronic journals. Nursing students will also make use of ROUTES⁴ (Resources for Open University Staff and Students), a searchable database of quality Internet sites which have been recommended for specific OU courses. A brief communication in a previous issue of *Health Information and Libraries Journal*⁵ by Alison Bremner describes ROUTES in more detail.

To help students navigate and use Open Library a selection of helpsheets and guides are provided online. Support and advice on the use of these resources will be provided by the Library's Learner Support. Students can contact the support team by email, telephone or via the OU's FirstClass conferencing system.

Developing the skills of evidence-based practice

Section 6 of the Nursing and Midwifery Council's Code of Professional Conduct deals with a registered nurse's requirement to maintain their professional knowledge and competence. In particular, Section 6.5 states that "You have a responsibility to deliver care based on current evidence, best practice and, where applicable, validated research where it is available".⁶ To achieve this competency, students will be encouraged to develop their information literacy skills. These skills have been defined by Cheek & Doskatsch⁷ and Maslin-Prothero⁸ and include the ability to identify an information need, the ability to translate these needs into search strategies, the ability to access and retrieve information, and the ability to filter this information for quality and relevance. In using patient scenarios to deliver parts of the programme, it will be possible to integrate the development of these skills into the curricula as recommended by Cheek & Doskatsch⁷ and others. For example, the Common Foundation programme module KYN107, Introducing Professional Knowledge and Practice, will be using a series of four case scenarios which will be presented to students on a CDROM. The scenarios are being chosen to encourage the students to understand the importance of a holistic approach to care. Additionally, the chosen scenarios are selected for their increasing levels of complexity, beginning on the health care continuum with the healthy patient and progressing to ever more dependant patients and clients. Students will be encouraged to reflect on their current knowledge and to identify the areas in which they have an

information need. For this level one course students will then be provided with material which will enable them to satisfy these needs. The material will include journal articles and web sites. Students will begin to understand the range of information sources available, how these different resources relate to one another and the relative importance of these different types of resources. They will also begin to consider the quality of the information they are using and how to use a structured approach to evaluate the information they are accessing.

For example, the first scenario encountered by the student is centered around an otherwise fit and healthy older person who falls on the ice one cold February morning and breaks her wrist. The students are guided to view this person holistically. They are encouraged to pose questions concerning the care of this patient both before and after treatment. In order to facilitate this the CD is split into two sections. The first part of the CD shows an audio/video clip of the person with the broken wrist describing her situation as she sits in the Accident and Emergency Department. At this point students are invited to pose questions concerning what they need to know in order to care for this person effectively. An on line notepad is supplied for the student to write down their questions and any other notes. Answers to questions can then be acquired via the CD links to the various sources and resources outlined above. Additionally, specially developed video clips of key nursing skills will be available alongside other more widely available information.

Later, in conjunction with the written distance learning text, and at an appropriate moment, the student is led into the second part of the scenario. Here, the patient has received hospital treatment and is back at home. We show a second video clip of the husband struggling to care for his wife who has now become confused. Again, the student is encouraged to ask a wide range of questions, from the physical care and the physiological processes taking place to the psychological and social implications involved in caring for the patient. The multidisciplinary team and the resources they can bring to bear are additional considerations which the student is encouraged to consider and links within the CD also facilitate this enquiry. In these ways, cognitive and key skills, including retrieving information, are developed within in a firmly practice based and patient centered context.

As the students continue through the programme they will be taught how to systematically search for their own information using the bibliographic databases and the specialist sources which are now available for tracing high quality evidence. Use will be made of SAFARI⁹ (Skills in Accessing, Finding and Reviewing Information), a new web-based tutorial in information skills which the Library has developed.

Library issues

The programme raises a number of issues for the Library which still have to be addressed. These include:

- Making sure the students have the basic IT skills to access Open Library.
- Liaising with licensors and libraries in the student nurses' employing Trusts to ensure that the students and mentors will have access to the resources they need.

- Developing methods of assessing the students' information literacy skills.

References

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- ⁴ ROUTES <http://routes.open.ac.uk>
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- ⁶ Nursing and Midwifery Council *Code of Professional Conduct*. [online], NMC. Available from <http://www.nmc-uk.org/cms/content/Publications/>
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- ⁸ Maslin-Prothero, S.E. A perspective on lifelong learning and its implications for nurses. *Nurse Education Today*, 1997, **17**, 431-436
- ⁹ SAFARI <http://www.open.ac.uk/safari>

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 - ⁷ Cheek, J. & Doslatsch, I. Information literacy : a resource for nurses as lifelong learners. *Nurse Education Today*, 1998, **18**, 243-250
 - ⁸ Maslin-Prothero, S.E. A perspective on lifelong learning and its implications for nurses. *Nurse Education Today*, 1997, **17**, 431-436
 - ⁹ SAFARI <http://www.open.ac.uk/safari>