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You are here: Home > Professional > Nurturing the future workforce

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Nurturing the future workforce

11 AUGUST, 2016 10:08 AM | BY CLAIRE UREN

Student nurse placements in general practice have traditionally been few and far between. However, several influencing factors have created more opportunities for students to experience this aspect of healthcare provision. At Bournemouth University (BU) we now have the opportunity to work with local GP practices to establish placements for general practice nurses.



One influencing factor is the concern about maintaining the workforce in this area of nursing due to demographic changes. It is evident that the practice nursing workforce is ageing and, combined with the increased demand for primary care services, it is recognised that students need to experience this specialty during their pre-registration programme in order to consider it as a potential career choice. In addition, some financial remuneration is now available to practices that offer student nurse placements.

At BU we are already receiving very positive feedback from students who have experienced a practice nurse placement, giving them a greater insight into the role. This is encouraging them to consider employment in this area. A positive placement experience during the pre-registration programme is known to influence students when considering their first post as a registered nurse and may also impact on long-term career choices.

Students benefit from working as part of the multidisciplinary team, increasing their understanding of the different roles involved in primary care. The learning opportunities are diverse and help students to develop a broad range of clinical skills, a deeper understanding of chronic disease management and holistic patient-centred care. The benefits also include the development of skills in team-working, decision-making and time management.

Practice nurses see this as a great opportunity to pass on their knowledge and skills, in an environment where one-to-one support can be offered. Supporting students in practice promotes reflection, feedback and evaluation, all of which contribute to the revalidation process. In addition, the rewarding process of supporting a learner can increase confidence and job satisfaction.

Of course this process does not come without its challenges and the most prominent obstacle is time. It is inevitable that supporting a learner requires time for teaching, assessments and providing feedback and some learners will require more support than others. However, students also have a lot to offer placements, with up-to-date knowledge, enthusiasm and time to research topics, which can benefit the whole team.

A mentorship qualification is required, which can also be a challenge. However, training is offered to those who do not have a mentorship qualification. This can be beneficial in terms of meeting CPD requirements and also adds another element to the nurse's role. Although the main mentor has overall responsibility for the student, other members of the team can contribute to this process, helping the student to gain a deeper understanding of the wider context of primary care.

In order for the placement to be successful the mentor needs the support of the whole team. GPs and practice managers must recognise the long-term benefits of supporting students in general practice. Equally, the Higher Education Institute (HEI) must provide adequate preparation for students before they start their placement and ensure that ongoing support is available throughout.

Introducing students to this specialty during their pre-registration programme provides an excellent opportunity to promote it as a future career pathway and ensure services are sustained and developed.

FEATURED IN ISSUE:
Nursing in Practice | 91

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