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The school nursing course in the Northeast of Scotland

This paper aims to share insights into the education preparation of school nurses to acquire essential competence and interdisciplinary approach to learning and practice.

Background

In 2013, the Chief Nursing Officer for Scotland published a letter directing that the School Nurses on school aged pupils (5 to 19 years). This led to an examination of the functional role of the school nurse and the education required to meet the health and wellbeing needs of children and young people. Scottish government recognised the need for strengthening the school aged (5-19 years) pupils' health and wellbeing needs in post registration education for school nurses (CEL.13). Other legal and policy factors also shaped the education agendas (Scottish Government 2015; 2013).

The current education preparation of specialist community public health nurse -school nurses (SCPHN-SN) is first of its kind to respond to areas within NHS workforce plan by providing master's level education in Northeast of Scotland. The course is approved by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) therefore, practice facilitation of learning and support takes cognisance of the standards of proficiencies for Specialist Community Public Health Nurses (NMC 2004), the Standards to Support Learning in Practice (NMC, 2008) as well as the nationally set priority areas. School nurses' role is advancing to meet the complex needs of school-aged population (5-19 years), and in contemporary practice it requires a level equivalent to advanced nursing practice. Therefore, this course is designed to link theory and practice to support the nationally recognised priority areas (SN Pathways). The course among other things, offers students the opportunity of interprofessional learning (IPL) as they will make crucially contribution to wider agenda of key public services that serve the 5-19 years population. It also offers opportunity to contextualise a breadth of knowledge and skills within a contemporary community public health practice. This is evident in the way students' practice learning are cross mapped to the NMC domains and SN pathways. They are supported in placement by practice teachers and school nurse mentors in some jurisdiction who challenges them to explore their depth of knowledge and demonstrate the theory-practice integration.

Personal experiences

At Robert Gordon University school of nursing and midwifery, measures were undertaken at the post registration level, accentuates online blended learning experience for student school nurses. The underpinning ethos and philosophy are the idea that school nursing students, young people and families may value genuine competence, and relationships that respects individual's background and strengths (NMC 2004). However, recognising what works well for young people and families based on their strengths does not mean ignoring challenges or spinning their struggles into strengths. It means school nursing students will work in a collaborative approach to support young people to identify early patterns of concern and address them appropriately. Genuine partnership with practice has been the cornerstone to facilitate students' experience to achieve personal and professional goals. This ensured that students developed SMART learning contracts and negotiated these through their practice teachers and the personal tutor, which formalised the partnership working throughout the course.

Personal and academic tutor role

The personal and academic tutor role was pivotal, creating learning experience for the students, and providing support for pastoral and other issues. The role required a recordable NMC nurse teacher qualification that meant that the tutor provided interactive on-site tutorial. It offered opportunity for periodic checks for engagement and knowledge building, understanding, and identification of gaps in comprehension (Race, 2015). During on-site tutorial, students may work in pairs or small groups to solve real life problems to enable space for experiential and peer-to-peer learning thereby, enriching discussions. Case study discussions about young people and their experiences with digital conversation, simulated service-user interviews flavoured module assignments.

In addition to a personal tutor, the students are assigned an academic tutor for each module they undertake.

Lessons Learned so far

The evaluations provided by the students at a joint meeting of NHS managers and academic staff were positive, revealing high levels of satisfaction and good engagement. Strategies to attract prospective students should be through better advertisement with clear statement on student's core gains in undertaking the course. Other academic members of staff were directly involved with the on-site tutorial and contributed hugely to students experience and engagement. This shows that the focus was on the students and what their needs for engagement and experience were. Further, there has been a shift in the role of lecturers who essentially have become facilitators of learning: engagement and experience. The biggest challenge will be to continue this teaching and learning approach.

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