The Positive Learning Environment: Mental Health Student Nurses’ Perspectives

Aim of evaluation: To explore Mental Health Student Nurses’ opinion of helpful strategies to promote learning whilst on placement. Participants: Out of a cohort, 12 third year Mental Health Nursing Students studying the Diploma/BSc course at the University of Nottingham, who were in their management placement discussed this topic. Consent: The Students agreed to participate in a focus group discussion & being photographed. Data Collection: Using the principles of focus groups (Kreger & Casey 2000), data was collected to explore the question: ‘In your experience what makes a good placement?’ Data Analysis: The recorded data was transcribed (verbatim), Thematic Content Analysis (Burnard, 1991) was used to produce five common themes: ‘Pre-Placement Info’, ‘Welcome’, ‘Management & Organisation’, ‘Mentors’ & ‘Working in Partnership’. References


Welcome

• Being called by your name, not ‘the student’
• Orientated to the ward, shown where things are kept e.g. the paperwork
• The manager & staff to introduce themselves & explain the purpose of their roles
  • All staff to wear name badges
  • Introduced to Service Users by staff
  • Having a personal alarm/card/keys

Management & Organisation

• Access to the computer systems
• Resource area with textbooks, journals, latest information
• Pre-planned activities e.g. training days with my mentor
• Easier systems for identifying relevant Service User information e.g. colour coded information on a whiteboard
• Opportunities to get involved in all aspects of care
  • Being involved in the delegation process e.g. administrating medication, ward rounds etc
  • Being given responsibility relevant to stage of training
  • Having a small caseload

Pre-Placement Info

• Getting an up-to-date Introductory Pack
  • Identified mentor & associate mentor prior to placement
  • Having mapped unique learning opportunities identified in each placement & relevant insight visits
  • Specific uniform or being specific about what ‘smart casual dress’ means

Summary

The Students highlighted key issues that helped their learning in practice. The themes identified appear to be relatively simple to implement & can make a positive contribution to their learning.

Recommendations

Placements need to ensure that Information Packs are up-to-date & readily available for learners. That students are perceived as individuals & a valuable resource. There are planned meaningful activities to promote participation in the care of Service Users. Frequent meetings with mentors are arranged to encourage learning & ensure service needs are met.

Action

Dissemination of these findings to practice areas through Practice Learning Teams & submission of an article for publication. The issues raised within this focus group would suggest the need for further evaluation so the facilitators to undertake a larger study with Students from other branches of nursing.

Mentors

• Sets dates/times for meetings, pre-booked supervision
  • Who get to know you as ‘a person’
• Finds out your strengths & learning needs & helps construct an action plan
• Being approachable & encouraging - shares experiences/self disclosure
• Helps you move out of your comfort zone
  • Offers constructive feedback
• Explains the evidence base for practice, linking theory to practice
• Takes an interest in assignments & portfolios
• Signs off Outcomes/Proficiencies throughout the placement, rather than leaving it to the last minute
• Arranges co-mentor cover when on leave

Working in Partnership

• Having a ‘Befriender’, working with a support worker for the first few days
• An integrated team, where everyone works together
• Being listened to & acknowledged as having credible opinions
• Shadowing different members of the team e.g. Psychiatrists, Social Workers, Domestic Staff
  • Service Users & Carers who are welcome
• Learning from Service Users & Carers e.g. What it feels like to take medication
• Consistency - seeing same Service User from the start, watching their progress

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