Reducing pressures on practice whilst enhancing competence and confidence in students
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Could simulation help?
- Increasingly used to evaluate clinical and non-technical skills (NTS) competencies.
- Useful for complementing practice.
- An important contributor to the patient safety agenda.
- Students undertaking appropriate simulated placements are equal in competence and readiness for practice to those undertaking ‘traditional’ placements (Hayden et al., 2014).
- Up to 300 hours of student nurses’ total placement time may be spent in simulated learning (NMC, 2010).

Student feedback
- Communication was a big learning factor to me.
- I was also able to reflect on the experiences I took part in and observed.
- It has made me feel more confident with working with people out in the different settings.
- It allows me to hone my skills in a healthcare setting without exposing a service user to any risks.
- I learned how to work as a team.
- I believe it really helps with the transition from theory to practice.
- It has made me realise that I can handle certain situations when under pressure.
- I now have greater confidence in clinical settings and feel prepared. Highly recommended.

What we did
- One week of simulated scenarios, NTS training and debriefing, plus reflection on the emotional aspects of care, for first year adult, child and mental health nursing students.
- Mostly low-tech simulation, plus a small amount of high-tech.
- The complexity of the scenarios progressed during the course of the week.

Outcomes
- Rapid development of the NTS competencies, which are essential to patient safety.
- Participants were better able to combine their clinical and NTS at the week progressed.
- Students reported increased confidence in applying clinical and NTS in practice following the week of simulated learning.
- Positive feedback on students’ enhanced clinical and NTS competencies reported by mentors.
- The potential for the programme to reduce some pressures on placement areas and to complement practice.

Challenges
1. Pressures on placements from removing the cap on student numbers.
2. Potentially increased demands from students, who will become ‘consumers’ when bursaries cease.
3. Reduced availability and increasing busyness of placement areas (Brooks, Moriarty and Welyczko, 2010).

These factors combine to make providing an appropriate range and quality of student placements increasingly difficult. In addition, students often report feeling unprepared for practice, despite good theory and skills teaching.

References:

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