

Guidance for Practice Educators/Mentors for placement support strategies for students



Version 1.0

08.02.2016

Update August 2016

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Placements can be a challenging time particularly for students. A new environment with the accompanying new stresses means that the strategies for success they have already developed may not now work so well. It is important that students prepare carefully and to try to anticipate where difficulties may be encountered. Their current coping methods or ways of working may be useful in these new situations or new ones need to be considered and developed. To make the most of the learning opportunities available there needs to be discussion and collaboration between the student and Practice Educator/Mentor

This document could help you consider different aspects that may pose challenges.

Before Placement

Students will have been encouraged to identify and disclose individual learning needs, strengths and areas for development and are urged to share these with you. They will have also undertaken some preparation for practice sessions and can continue to access support resources via Moodle (student intranet).

We encourage all students to contact you well in advance of starting placement.

NB: Nursing and Midwifery students their contact details are provided as part of the change lists and if you wish to contact students in advance then please feel free to do so. Mentors also have the opportunity to ask to see a student's ongoing achievement records throughout the duration of the programme.

1. Writing

There are several problems that commonly arise with writing on placement. These include speed of writing, making mistakes, having to rewrite or copy up notes, and making writing legible. Spelling and grammar needs to be consistent. Writing whilst listening to what is being said can be a challenge.

How notes are structured and forms that are used can vary from place to place and so they need to familiarise yourself with the requirements as soon as possible.

Care needs to be taken to write the correct date, and not to transpose numbers (writing 261 instead of 216). The use of appropriate language, terminology, and approved abbreviations is a skill that needs to be acquired.

Strategies that may help:

- **Give extra time and a quiet place to write notes**
- **Give copies of any templates, or notes systems pre placement if possible**
- **Encourage them to take time to reread and check what has been written**
- **Suggest a crib sheet for assessments**
- **Use spell checkers, (could be on phone)**
- **Electronic notes**
- **Bullet points may help**
- **Use of a notebook to make a glossary of medical terms and drugs**
- **It may be possible to use a digital recorder**
- **Create a mind map or spider diagram of the important pieces of information first**
- **Give copy of approved abbreviations for that clinical area**
- **Write up notes after each patient contact**

2. Reading

Problems commonly associated with reading on placement include slow reading, misreading words or difficulties reading unfamiliar medical words and terminology.

Medical information may be presented on charts or forms which can be difficult to interpret until they are more familiar with them. It can be difficult to pick out relevant information from a large set of medical notes.

Strategies that may help:

- A quiet place and extra time to read
- Using a pen, ruler, or finger to help track where they are on a page
- Read smart: ask; what are you reading and why?
- Start with the most recent part of medical notes
- Jotting down relevant information into their notebook, underline, highlight
- Using notebook to record new words and their definition
- Using the electronic dictionary on computer or phone
- Using a coloured overlay if they have one
- Make handouts on coloured paper (rather than white) if this helps
- Give a blank copy of relevant charts to look at in their own time
- Whiteboards may need layout altering to help

3. Organisation

Organisation can be very challenging. Not only are the students now going to be working rather than studying, but they are also in a completely new environment; which is very stressful.

Strategies that may help:

- **Suggest a pre placement visit**
- **Signpost them to placement information**
- **Provide timetable for placement, prior to placement if possible**
- **Induction – provide as much information before placement as possible**
- **Encourage use of their notebook or file to record new and relevant information.**
- **Have a different page or colour for each list, (eg a list of new medical conditions). A highlighter may be useful.**
- **Encourage them to prepare crib sheets for assessment – and to use them**
- **Break down the work load into small chunks, then gradually increase**
- **Prepare for treatment sessions with ideas in their notebook**
 - **What will they do if the patient is the same, better, or worse?**
- **Draw maps of routes or plans of ward areas**
- **Give door key codes for them to put into phone or notebook**
- **Discuss if it is suitable for them to use their phone as an aid on placement**

4. Time Management

In a new environment, with new skills and new tasks, it can be easy to lose track of time.

Strategies that may help:

- **Use a watch, or have an agreement that they can use their phone, (perhaps have it in pocket). A vibrate alarm can help keep track of time when doing tasks like assessments.**
- **Could use phone for reminders**
- **Suggest they use a page-a-day diary to enter relevant deadlines, appointments, meetings, new patients, and to-do lists. A highlighter may help.**
- **Look ahead and prepare for the next day, enter what needs doing on calendar/diary, with timings.**
- **Lists can help**
 - **Suggest listing everything that needs doing for a task**
 - **Help them to break down into smaller steps**
 - **Prioritise the list – ask what is most important? Most urgent?**
 - **Highlighting in colours can help**
 - **Putting timings against list or into dairy can help**

5. Verbal

Since there is so much new material to remember it is easy to miss some of what is being said and can be hard to remember or understand all the instructions. Communication by Email can be very useful as students can refer back to the information that has been given.

When having discussions or giving information it may be worth considering alternative ways of communicating , such as having some of it written to be taken away. It can be that it takes time for a student to respond to questions that you are asking. It is not always that they haven't understood the question but that it takes time for them to assimilate the information and work out their response to you. Rather than repeat the question in a different format, which will restart the whole process, it can be better to pause and wait for a response.

Students can feel embarrassed about having to speak out in front of people or find pronouncing new names and medical terms a struggle. It can be helpful to practise these in a quiet place.

Strategies that may help:

- **Encourage using a notebook to write down what is being said**
- **It may be possible for conversations to be recorded**
- **Break down instructions, use less words**
- **Check that what has been discussed has been understood – summarise**
- **Give thinking time before repeating a question**
- **Only ask one question at a time**
- **After feedback sessions or discussions give space for some thinking time**
- **In team meetings or handovers help the student prepare what needs saying**

6. Patient Skills

Carrying out assessments and treatments with patients for the first time can be daunting, and it can be difficult to focusing on the task in hand. Learning to talk to patients, asking questions, listening, interpreting what is being said and writing it down within a set time takes a high degree of multi-tasking that requires practise.

Strategies that may help:

- **Preparation and planning**
- **Break down tasks into small chunks**
- **Using crib sheets**
- **Using charts, (eg pain charts) to collect information**
- **Practise, practise, practise**
- **Use patient goals to help prioritise treatment plans**

7. Recall and Working Memory

Memory problems are often more frequently encountered by people working under stress or experiencing new situations. Remembering everyone's name and names of wards can be a big challenge.

Practice Educator/Mentors often say 'I have to keep repeating myself'. This is not so surprising if you consider that a placement is a highly complex, dynamic environment which is new to the student. Following an assessment or intervention it can be difficult for a student to immediately explain what they have done. This information then needs to be synthesised to be able to analyse, clinically reason and to plan what needs to be done next. For it to make sense and be 'learnt' the new experience needs to be linked to prior knowledge and learning too. All of this can prove very challenging.

Strategies that may help:

- **Using a notebook**
- **Making time following patient contact to write notes, think about what they have done and organise their thoughts before being questioned**
- **It can help to * or highlight key findings and then focus on these for clinical reasoning and planning discussions**
- **Mnemonics can be helpful to recall key parts of prior knowledge, such as anatomy**
- **To encourage students to find their own way of working**
- **Guide the student towards relating theory to practice**
- **Encourage the student to reflect on their practice and share with you**
- **Numbering , using fingers, can help sequence and to remember order**

Finally

Each placement will be a unique experience with the student bringing individual learning needs which, through negotiation, the Practice Educator/Mentor will help guide the student to improve. The University Link Lecturer is available to provide support for Practice staff during placements.

Whilst on placement the student will still have access to support from the University via their University Link Lecturer, Personal Tutor and from Student Support Services.

Useful References

There is a comprehensive list of resources within the student intranet that Educators/Mentors will not have access to.

However, there may be resources on your own internal Trust organisational intranet that may prove useful for supporting students.

NURSING and MIDWIFERY

Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Dyscalculia: A Toolkit for Nursing and Midwifery Staff

http://www.rcn.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/333534/003835.pdf

Peer Mentor Leaders

https://twitter.com/PM_Leaders

PHYSIOTHERAPY

CSP Into Physiotherapy – Welcome and Supporting Disabled Students

<http://www.csp.org.uk/publications/physiotherapy-welcoming-supporting-disabled-students>

GENERAL

Academic Support at the University of Nottingham

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/student-services/support-for-your-studies/academic-support/index.aspx>

Association of Dyslexia Specialists In Higher Education

www.adshe.org.uk

British Dyslexia Association

www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

Counselling Service

www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling/index.aspx

Nightline

<http://www.nottinghamnightline.co.uk/>

Placement Support Twitter and Placement guidance video

https://twitter.com/UoN_PST

www.tinyurl.com/prepforpractice

Student Advice Centre

www.su.nottingham.ac.uk/advice/student-advice-centre/

Student Services

www.nottingham.ac.uk/student-services/index.aspx