

Curriculum and Pedagogic bases for integrating practice experiences within higher education

Case study #4 Preparing physiotherapy students for clinical practice (Monash University)

“The key messages I’m getting from this week are to be proactive in my learning during clinicals in terms of critically reflecting and not leaving it to the supervisor to make times with me for feedback. To be professional and show interest in what I am doing, be punctual and be prepared with notes. To concentrate on the patient rather than the fact that I am being tested and to understand that I am not the priority- the patient is.” (Student 10)

Program focus

The physiotherapy program at Monash University features extended periods of clinical practice which are between nine and 15 weeks in duration. Students have previously reported feeling unprepared for their clinical practice. In order to address this, a pre-clinical week was organised for third year students. It had two aims: i) to make transparent the often implicit expectations of clinical education; and ii) to provide students with knowledge and skills in adult learning and critical reflection.

How practice or workplace experiences are provided

Students are allocated to physiotherapy placements around the state of Victoria. These periods of clinical practice are quite extensive and the students are working relatively autonomously. During these periods of clinical practice, the students are required to interpret and respond to the changing expectations and knowledge base of the physiotherapy profession and wider health care community, and are assessed on their capacity to achieve these goals in clinical settings.

How those experiences are integrated into the course curriculum

In order to assist students be ready for their clinical practice, a pre-clinical week was organised of a four-day period prior to students undertaking their clinical practice that provided content and experiences associated with: the health system and patient discharge options, the clinical educator’s role, the student’s role, adult learning and learning styles, critical reflection, feedback and assessment, and leadership in clinical practice. In addition there were practical sessions associated with practical sessions: technical skill application and clinical reasoning. Throughout, it was emphasised that the students had an important role in managing their own learning and their own practice, and needed to do so critically and reflexively.

Particular curriculum practices

The pre-clinical week was sequenced to and focused on providing a combination of technical and process preparation prior to the students embarking upon their clinical practice.

Particular pedagogic practices

A variety of pedagogic strategies were used including presentations, workshops, opportunities to engage with more experienced students and to consider and reflect upon their requirements in the clinical practice period. Perhaps unsurprisingly, students were more concerned about their clinical competence than being prepared as reflective practitioners. However, as the quote above indicates there was some success of there.

Any evidence

Students reported that, through their participation in the workshop, they came to appreciate the importance of: i) learning the canonical knowledge and procedural skills to practice physiotherapy effectively, ii) learning something of the tricks of the trade, about what can go wrong in clinical practice, and strategies to deal with complex clinical problems, and iii), the importance of engagement in the practice.

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