Working at the coal face
The contribution of Programme Tutors in supporting practice-based learning in nursing
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What are the key features of effective Programme Tutor practice?
What are the enabling factors contributing to role effectiveness?

Cultivating positive practice learning

The cultivation of positive practice learning environments for students of nursing, including high quality learning support, has long been established as a thorny issue for nurse educators and practitioners. It is crucial that we get the learning support for students in the practice setting right. If we do not, it will have wide-ranging implications for the quality of patient care, work-related stress, role satisfaction, retention and attrition and professional reputation.

The Programme Tutor (PT) – a role unique to the pre-registration nursing programme at The Open University – is crucial in facilitating learning in the practice setting. The purpose of the role is to work longitudinally with both students and their mentors in the workplace to support learning in practice and monitor student progress.

Asking tutors

The overall aim of the project is to critically examine the experiences of a sample of PTs in order to identify the key features of effective PT practice. These features will then inform the continuing development of the programme and identify those aspects potentially transferable across the wider health education sector.

We recruited two PTs to be co-researchers on the project and identified a sample of PTs across the nations and regions and conducted telephone interviews with them. Using conventional approaches to qualitative data analysis, the transcripts were analysed to identify common themes emerging across the data.

Preliminary findings suggest that PTs find their role both rewarding and vital in the context of creating supportive learning environments for practice settings. Effective communication with students, mentors and service managers appears to be a crucial aspect of the success of this role. Many PTs have already incorporated aspects of the PT model into their substantive posts in the health service.

Find out more about this project and the Practice-based Professional Learning CETL at our web site: www.open.ac.uk/pbpl/

Practice-based Professional Learning Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

“My motivation in becoming a programme tutor was to work with students and inform their learning, to ensure they are equipped for the challenge of the role of staff nurse.”

“I was able to utilise my communication skills to facilitate deep learning, using a facilitative approach.”

“The role is very rewarding in seeing the development of your students, and the transition they go through from auxiliary nurse, to student nurse to an independent practitioner. There has been a lot of blood, sweat and tears over this period, but the relationships developed between myself, students and mentors are ones that will continue once the course has finished.”