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A student allied health professional's reflective account of a research delivery placement: changing attitudes

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Background

One percent of Allied Healthcare Professionals (AHPs) are involved in research, suggesting a lack of clinical workplace opportunities (NIHR, 2022). Dario *et al.*, (2021) reported a lack of clarity for student expectations during research-based placements.

Method

This is a reflection in practice account from the perspective of a pre-registration MSc Physiotherapy student during a seven-week research-based placement in a South West National Health Service (NHS) Foundation Trust. The reflective model used was adapted from Rolfe *et al.*, (2001) and is presented in the first person with evidence references.

Reflective account

I was stepping into unknown territory and felt uneasy approaching this research-based placement. I was initially suspicious of this placement; I was questioning the effectiveness of spending time in a non-patient facing role (Kulnik *et al.*, 2022).

In keeping my mind open, I was surprised with the experiences I gained. I had the space to shape my experience to fit my learning needs. This is not always the case when students feel pressured in patient-facing placements. I spent four-days-a-week learning how research is delivered within the NHS and one-day-a-week on how research-related activities are included in the research pillar of professional practice (Health Education England, 2017). Research should not be feared! It can be as routine as having discussions with peers about clinical audit ideas, constituting research-related activity. The research-based placements may be worrisome for AHP students; however, they can be a positive experience. Working alongside the research delivery team I was learning about conditions, treatment approaches and had the opportunity to receive training to delivery of a newly developed physiotherapy treatment programme within a clinical trial.

I valued learning about different research-orientated institutions: Council for Allied Health Profession Research (CAHPR) and the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). These support AHP involvement in research-based activities, and recently enhanced by the national policy to support clinical academic careers through the Insight Programme (NIHR, 2022). To consolidate my learning, I tied together the research practitioner competency framework (CAHPR, 2019) to the multiprofessional framework for advanced practice (Health Education England, 2017). I feel a sense of understanding how clinical research informs current practice development. I now have the confidence to outreach to research authors to gain advice and support for my own questions.

Conclusion

To implement research into clinical practice is not without challenges. 83% of newly qualified AHPs found work-based activities and clinical based knowledge building prioritised over research-based practice (Comer *et al.*, 2022). By continuing to open the door for graduate and undergraduate students to learn about how research delivery activities that underpin clinical practice, AHPs will strengthen the research pillar of their professional development.

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