



West Midlands Education Innovation and Notable Practice

**ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY: THE ROLE OF NON-CLINICAL
PLACEMENTS IN MEDICAL EDUCATION**

2010 - 2011



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KEELE MEDICAL SCHOOL

Overview:	We have developed a community placement programme for second year undergraduate medical students using third sector organisations across North Staffordshire.
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The value of experiential learning in the early years of medical education is well recognised¹ and many medical schools, including Keele, use placement based activities in the early years of their curricula. However, much of this activity remains based in clinical settings within primary or secondary care. Voluntary and statutory “third” sector organisations make a significant contribution to health and social care provision in the UK. We believe that this area provides an important resource for medical student learning and have developed a community based placement programme working with local third sector organisations for the Student Selective Component (SSC) of the second year of the Keele MBChB degree.

The programme has been designed to enhance students’ understanding of how voluntary and statutory organisations support people with health and social care needs; increase their understanding of the needs of local communities, raise their awareness of social and cultural diversity and foster links between the medical school, these organisations and the local community.

We have recruited organisations across the region that support people with a diverse range of needs, including areas such as mental health, substance abuse, disability, children and families, carer support and homelessness. Students are asked to choose 10 possible placements providers from a database of organisations. Each student is allocated a placement and required to spend 8 half day sessions with their chosen organisation. The learning objectives for the programme are to work effectively in a volunteer or work shadow role; to demonstrate practically acquired knowledge of: what the service does, how it supports its clients and the experiences and needs of the service users and their communities; and to apply and develop skills in communication, organisation and management, presentation and team working. The assessment of the programme comprises: a poster presentation, a 1500 word reflective summary and an evaluation report completed by the organisation about the student.



The programme ran for the first time in the 2008/9 academic year. Student feedback has been generally positive with many students indicating that they had gained a lot from the experience:

‘The SSC placement was very different from other placements during the Module. I enjoyed learning about services and aspects of the voluntary and community sector that I would have otherwise

probably remained largely unaware of. I found it greatly stimulated my learning and interest in this field and I have used this learning opportunity to widen my breadth of knowledge, which I feel will be of benefit to future practice.’ (Student evaluation questionnaire, 2008/9)

Some students have expressed concerns about the costs of travelling to placements. In addition, there have been some problems with timetabling, with the best time for a placement not necessarily coinciding with the allocated space on the timetable. Placement provider feedback has been positive and the majority of organisations have remained with the programme.

Based upon the success of the programme the School has recently developed the “Cluster Project” initiative for Module (Year) 5, using many of the same providers. These involve students working together on a project that has been developed by community organisations who have identified an important need within the community. One of the biggest challenges of developing a community placements programme is the recruitment and maintenance of the organisations. The appointment of a dedicated Placement Development Officer in the School in 2009 has enabled us to continue to recruit further organisations and provide a key point of contact and support for placement providers.

Overall, our experiences of developing and delivering the programme have been overwhelmingly positive and have strengthened our belief that such placements have much to offer medical education.

References

Dornan T, Littlewood S, Margolis SA, Scherpbier A, Spencer J and Ypinazar V, 2006. How can experience in clinical and community settings contribute to early medical education? A BEME systematic review. *Medical Teacher*, **28**, 1, pp3-18.