



# West Midlands Education Innovation and Notable Practice

SUPPORTING THE STRUGGLING STUDENT: A TOOL FOR MENTORS

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## SUPPORTING THE STRUGGLING STUDENT: A TOOL FOR MENTORS

KEELE UNIVERSITY

**Overview:** A tool for mentors to support struggling student in practice using the nursing process.

**Lead :** Abbie Barnes, Mark Ayres, Placement Quality Lead Lecturer, Clinical Placement Facilitator,  
a.barnes@nur.keele.ac.uk - mark.ayres@uhns.nhs.uk

The evidence suggests that passing students in the hope that they will improve later in the course or as a newly qualified nurse has serious consequences for patients, students and future mentors. Student nurses highly value clinical practice and the possibilities it offers in the process of becoming a nurse. Nevertheless, the clinical environment is unpredictable and constantly changing, making it difficult to plan an optimal clinical learning environment for students. Add in the issue of a problematic struggling student and it can be overwhelming for the mentor.

The current literature illustrates mentors find the interpersonal aspects of their role easy and viewed this positively. However, there is a marked tendency for mentors to have more difficulty with the cognitive/intellectual aspects of the role, including assessing the student and providing constructive feedback to the student (Moseley & Davies 2007). Kathleen Duffy (2004) studied the issue of mentors failing to fail students and with the rise of complaints of registrants to the Nursing Midwifery Council regarding fitness to practice, clear guidelines are needed.

Evidently the mentor's role is not only supporting, but also assessing, student nurses assessment will be seen even more strongly in the clinical area as a major component of pre-registration nurse education 2011. The Nursing Times Survey (2010) suggested some mentors lack the skills and confidence to make safe judgments (NMC 2010). An effective tool and clear guidance of how to define, monitor and support a borderline struggling student for mentors will aid the decision making process (refer to flowchart below).

Walsh (1967) published the nursing process and suggests that nursing should develop a problem-solving approach in which the nurse and patient can undertake four steps. This flexible systematic approach has been adapted by Keele University School of Nursing and Midwifery to support mentors in their role and assist them in making the initial crucial decisions in whether the student nurse is achieving or under-achieving their practice outcomes and sparks the mentor to call for help from the link lecturer and clinical placement facilitator if in doubt. With the challenges of mentorship the struggling student requires an effective tool to ensure fitness to practice at the point of registration.

The placement providers involved in the development was University Hospital of North Staffordshire NHS Trust and collaborative partnership working with North Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Community Healthcare and North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust. The tool has been presented at the NET 2010 conference and cascaded at the local practice mentor updates for dissemination to the placement areas. Following NET 2010 conference I received positive feedback and suggestions this tool will be rolled out in other organisations. The future plan is to monitor the impact of this tool; at moderation of practice meetings; feedback from mentors; students; and the number of mentors requesting guidance and support if they have a student who is struggling in practice.

### References:

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- Nursing Midwifery Council (2010) *Update Aug 2010: Mentoring matters – pass it on*. London, Nursing Midwifery Council.
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Walsh (1967) *The Nursing Process* cited in Kozier, B et al (2008) *Fundamentals of Nursing: Concepts, process and practice*. Essex Pearson Education Ltd.