

An evaluation of online clinical pharmacy placements for Master of Pharmacy undergraduates

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Background

During the global Coronavirus pandemic, it was necessary for some placements for healthcare undergraduates to be replaced with online experiences (Daftary *et al*, 2020; Roskvist *et al*, 2020; Salter *et al*, 2020). At one university, hospital pharmacy tutors developed a series of live online events to deliver placement intended learning outcomes (ILOs). Topics covered during 13 small-group placements for pharmacy students in years 2-4 included therapeutics e.g. respiratory and diabetes, and clinical skills e.g. clinical checking.

Aim and objectives

The aim was to evaluate students' perceptions of online clinical pharmacy placements. Objectives included identifying perceived benefits as well as disadvantages and exploring factors influencing student opinions.

Methods

An online survey was developed using closed, Likert scale and open question types. Topics explored were relevant to the delivery of all placements and included learning experiences, tutor support and technological

issues. A participant information sheet was emailed to students before the survey was released via the university's virtual learning environment. Students had six weeks to respond, with an email reminder sent after four weeks. The survey was anonymous and evaluated a teaching intervention; as such ethical approval was not required.

Results

Sixty-six students completed the survey (overall response rate 14.6%); 16 students were from year 2, 20 from year 3, 30 from year 4 and the majority of respondents were female (76%, n=50). Statistical analysis (Mann-Whitney U test) revealed no significant differences between student responses according to year group or gender. The majority of students agreed that online placements met their ILOs (78%, n=49) and were satisfied with placement tutor support (95%, n=60).

".. we still learnt just as much as if we physically went to the hospital" Yr4.13

"I like how our tutors are still trying their best to deliver practical and useful information to ensure the essential knowledge is passed on" Yr2.10

However, around a third (35%, n= 22) thought that online placements did not adequately replicate in-person placements.

"We do not have an opportunity to speak to patients ... making them appear rather pointless" Yr2.5

Most students (79%, n=52) experienced technological problems sometimes or often, with 36% (24) reporting a resultant adverse effect on their learning experience.

"Having poor Wi-Fi connection makes online sessions much more difficult and frustrating to complete" (Yr4.18).

Conclusions

Limitations include the low overall response rate, which limits the generalisability of the findings. This study confirms that online placements permitted successful delivery of ILOs related to therapeutics and clinical skills. However, they were not wholly effective in replicating in-person placements; it was not possible to simulate the clinical environment nor interactions with patients and the multidisciplinary team. Students frequently encountered technological problems which were a barrier to learning; universities must consider this when planning blended learning delivery.

References: Daftary, M.N., Jorden, J., Habib, M., Pather, I., & Tofade, T. (2020). Implementing virtual experiences and remote assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic: A college experience. *Pharmacy Education*, 20(2), 54 – 55. Roskvist, R., Eggleton, K., & Goodyear-Smith, F. (2020). Provision of e-learning programmes to replace undergraduate medical students' clinical general practice attachments during COVID-19 stand-down. *Education for Primary Care*, 31 (4), 247-254. Salter, C., Oates, R.K., Swanson, C., & Bourke, L. (2020). Working Remotely: Innovative Allied Health Placements in Response to COVID-19. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 21(5), 587-600.