

Background

During the Coronavirus pandemic, pharmacy undergraduate hospital placements at one university were rationalised due to capacity problems and high local levels of infection. Placements focussing on consultation skills were eventually delivered for years 2-4. Research in nursing (Swift *et al*, 2020) suggests that students may have a variety of anxieties about attending placement during the pandemic.

Aim and objectives

The aim was to evaluate students' opinions on attending hospital placements during the Coronavirus pandemic. Objectives included exploring concerns and any factors influencing student opinions.

Methods

An online survey was prepared before placements were delivered, using closed, Likert scale and open questions. Topics explored included travel arrangements, infection control and induction requirements as well as possible influencing factors such as COVID-19 mortality risk (e.g. ethnicity, long-term conditions) and home circumstances (e.g. living with vulnerable relatives). A participant information sheet was emailed before the survey was released via the university's virtual learning environment. All students had six weeks to complete

the survey, with an email reminder sent after four weeks. The survey was anonymous and explored a teaching intervention; as such, ethical approval was not required by the university. Data were analysed using simple descriptive statistics, and chi squared tests used to determine relationships between variables.

Results

Eighty-two students completed the survey (response rate 13.2%). Of these, 71% (58) were of non-white ethnicity and all had low COVID-19 risk scores. Although none had caring responsibilities, 32% (26) lived with family. More than half (55%, n=45) were worried about being exposed to Coronavirus on placement, with 38% (31) concerned about the health of those they lived with.

"I have vulnerable family members and I worry that I might cause harm." Yr4.22

"The COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing and UK cases are still very unstable ... no one can 100% guarantee our safety in the hospital." Yr4.8

Whilst the majority (74%, n=61) were confident wearing personal protective equipment (PPE), 29% (24) students were concerned about using public transport and reassurance about adequate precautions was sought.

"I am nervous about using public transport and feel there is no point in travelling all that way..." Yr3.8



"Getting tested at least twice a week and providing a full PPE protection [will be required]." Yr2.15

There was no statistical association between placement concerns and student ethnicity or living with family.

Conclusions

Limitations of this study include the low response rate, which limits generalisability. Findings confirm many students had concerns about their health and those they lived with. Placement tutors provided reassurance via induction elearning, access to PPE, vaccination and lateral flow testing. Placement providers should be mindful of student concerns, taking travelling and home circumstances into account when planning future placements.