

Intercultural issues experienced by international students on practice placement in the UK

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Where are we from?



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BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy

- 3 year degree
- Recruitment: 112 per year
- University based modules
 - First year
 - Parts of year 2 and 3
- Clinical based modules
 - 5 x 6 week blocks on practice placement
 - Allocated to practice educator
 - University tutor visits



Background

- In 2015, Coventry University recruited its first group of international students to the BSc Physiotherapy Course
- Student progression rates not commensurate with home students
 - Particularly evident on practice placement
 - Challenges with language and cultural differences
- These factors triggered the current research

Aims of the Research

1. Identify factors that influenced learning on practice placement for international students
2. Synthesise the findings to develop a model of support for international physiotherapy students



Exploration

What are the experiences of international physiotherapy students and the staff who support them, of their first practice placements in the UK?



Methodology

- Qualitative approach
- Exploring multiple perspectives
- Focus groups
- Thematic analysis of data

Findings

Themes

- Intercultural communication issues
- Student stress
- Preconceived ideas of staff
- Importance of the practice educator



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Intercultural Communication Issues

“She was stepped back from the patient, which was a potential safety issue. She would be doing a balance test and the patient would be over a metre a way”
(Practice Educator)

“I felt like I needed to say ‘OK this is how you greet a patient with eye contact and introduce yourself... and this is a comfortable amount of space between you and the patient’”
(Practice Educator)

Intercultural Communication Issues

“...I think if some
happened I neede
but not in a joking
think if they just ke
their mind and not
know, it is not appropriat

(Student)

“sometimes we want to appear more
chilled or humorous and chat with the
team-mates but because of the
communication failures, it just separates
a student like me from the team, where I
can’t get involved in the topics they are
talking about - it makes me appear to be
very outside the team”

(Student)

Student Stress

“Even though I speak
English, it’s not
actually so easy,
so I think it makes

“ you have to learn loads of stuff
on the placement, then it will be
hard work to do your revision after
work... its quite overwhelming”

(Student)

... we go on a
placement it’s like you
are trying to emigrate
to another country
... else again”

“... cos if you fail a placement that
means that you have to stay here
longer and means more money...”

(Student)

Preconceived Ideas of Staff

“I think one reason she did quite well was because it was a slower paced placement”

(Visiting Tutor)

“I think maybe because they have paid so much money for the course, they expect to achieve high marks”

(Clinical Educator)

Importance of the Practice Educator

“ I had three educators so every day I was following a different educator. They told me they had similar styles, but their styles in checking the patients was really different. They expected me to follow their own style...
...I found it quite difficult”

(Student)

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- Preconceived ideas of staff
- Importance of the practice educator



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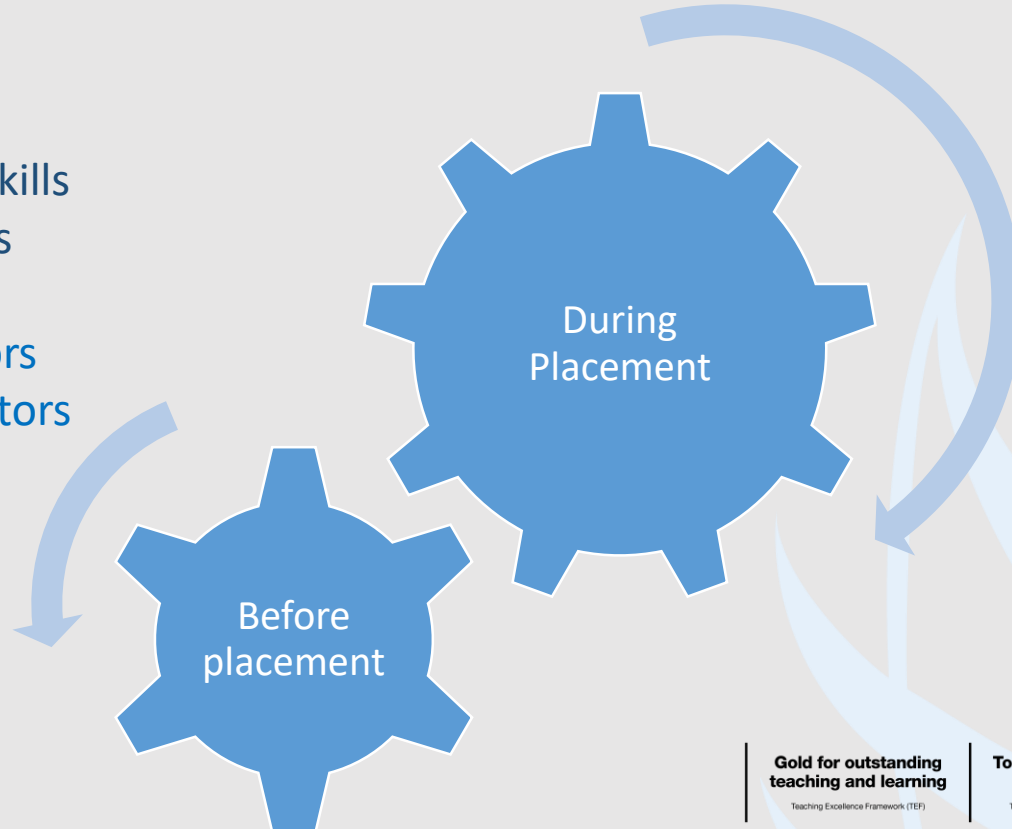
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Model of Support for International Students on Practice Placement

- English language skills
- Cultural awareness training
 - University tutors
 - Practice Educators
 - Students



- Support for clinical staff
- Peer support for students
- Regular contact with University
- Time to speak own language
- Dedicated time learning activities

Conclusion

- International students have the same issues on practice placement as home students, however....
- Enhancing cultural competence in staff is essential
- Focussed strategies are required to enhance student learning

Focused support for students from different cultural backgrounds is essential to enable a positive learning experience

The findings of this research have contributed to the development of a focused support strategy for international students on practice placement

Jackie Shanley and Nicky Knowles

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