Students’ Experience on Practice Placements

Shirley Hill, Head of Disability Services & Professional Doctorate Student
s.hill@dundee.ac.uk
Research Rationale

- Issues evident from my work
- Large number of professional programmes
- Increased focus on “the student experience”
- Literature review - limited comparisons
- Gap in the placement experience literature
Research Methodology

- Compared disabled and non-disabled students’ experience on practice placements
- Six professional disciplines in one university
- Mixed methods design: online survey (353); interviews (21)
- Comparison also with discipline placement feedback
Overview of Results

- Positive experiences reported – students develop confidence and skills, reinforce knowledge and confirm career choice

- Students identified the need for longer placements, particularly to develop relationships

- Disabled and non-disabled students reported similar experiences but analysis revealed some differences

- Differences also between students in different disciplines
Disabled students rated their overall placement experience lower than non-disabled students.

Disabled students experienced more difficulties on placement.

Students in Nursing and Education were less likely to disclose their disability on placement.

Nursing students felt less well prepared for placement than students in other disciplines.
Thematic Analysis – Similarities

- Travelling to placement
- Managing workloads and accessing support
- Expectations of students and role of placement staff
- Relationships with placement staff:

  “Sometimes it can ruin a block if you just have someone who is just unnecessarily unpleasant and doesn’t want to give you the time of day...it discourages students from learning” (medical student)
Similarities – Exacerbated for Disabled Students

- Impact of student’s impairment affected by travel:
  “My first placement I was relying on public transport...and I found that because of adding that extra bit of time on and how tired that was then making me, my dyslexia was noticeably worse to me” (social work student)

- Relationships affected by reaction to disclosure:
  “He kinda looked at me like I’d grown another head, you know” (medical student)
Thematic Analysis – Differences

- Disability disclosure and identity:
  
  "I was enjoying this new identity and I still find it difficult to say I have a disability…it’s disability or difficulty as an issue, separate from me” (social work student)

- Different attitudes to disability in different disciplines:

  "They were really interested in seeing how I was supported at school to what it is now…like they used it as a tool, how it had all changed round” (education student)
Thematic Analysis – Differences (cont.)

- Disabled people viewed as recipients not providers of support:
  
  “Lots of people, and I’m not saying everyone, just think that all doctors are healthy and we are this breed like of super human people who don’t have any problems at all” (medical student)

- Supportive attitudes more evident where placement staff had prior experience of disability issues:
  
  “The response in the mental health setting was excellent as they understood” (nursing student)
Recommendations for Practice – All Students

- Provide pre-placement guidance for students and staff
- Clarify role and responsibilities of placement staff
- Clarify expectations of students and their development needs
- Identify placement staff best placed to undertake mentor role
- Provide advance notice and support with placement travel
- Provide longer placement opportunities
- Ensure ongoing monitoring and communication
Additional Recommendations – Disabled Students

- Review placement allocation procedures
- Facilitate prior contact with placement provider
- Clarify implications of disclosure on placement
- Offer students control over timing and nature of disclosure
- Undertake individual needs assessments where appropriate
- Establish written agreement on provision of adjustments
- Provide disability awareness training for placement mentors
Concluding Thoughts

- Inclusive approach important but may still need to identify reasonable adjustments for individual disabled students.

- Challenge to encourage disclosure using medical model categories when disabled students may not identify with these.

- Perpetuating medical model to ensure access to funding and support whilst encouraging social model/inclusive approach to teaching and assessment.