

Understanding the Induction and Settling-in Process for Students on Prosthetic and Orthotic Practice Placements

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Introduction

The practice placement provides the opportunity to establish professional and clinical skills, and apply theory into practice (Pitanken et al. 2018), and is a key element of Prosthetic and Orthotic (P&O) education programmes.

However practice placements are often reported as being the most stressful and challenging element of an undergraduate programme (Shahabi et al, 2019). Beginning a new placement can be a daunting experience and there is a need to ensure the student is well-supported. An effective orientation and induction can prepare students to engage in their learning on placement (NES, 2018).

Aim

To understand the induction process and the experience of a new student undertaking a P and O practice placement from the student's and practice educator's point of view.

Method

- The University clinical placement co-ordinator of an approved ISPO undergraduate Prosthetic & Orthotic programme attended at a local NHS facility for induction and first day of clinic.
- The co-ordinator wore the uniform of a student but didn't conceal the fact they were a member of staff from the patients. (See Figure 1.)
- An induction handbook was provided prior to attendance (AHP Practice Placement Quality Group, 2021).
- Attendance and participation in a routine clinic, and management of ward patients allowed the placement co-ordinator to interact with patients under the supervision of the Practice Educator.
- The practice educator and placement co-ordinator shared their experience.

Results

The clinical placement co-ordinator attended an orthotic foot and ankle clinic in a local hospital, in the role of a student. The induction process highlighted the complexity of knowledge required to safely join an NHS facility to carry out a placement.

'Student' view

Positive Aspects

- clear induction process and joining instructions.
- opportunity to work with a range of clinicians
- understanding the role of an Orthotist in both inpatient and outpatient setting.
- Feeling welcomed and included by the team

Challenging Aspects

- Managing first day nerves
- Trying to become familiar with several different IT systems
- Not being accepted as autonomous practitioner by a patient

Results...continued

Practice Educator's view

Positive Aspects

- Student supervision is enjoyable & rewarding – helping support the next generation of clinicians
- Enables clinician to develop their teaching and learning skills

Challenging Aspects

- Limited space to accommodate students
- Additional time required to explain processes and procedures, especially in induction period

Discussion and Conclusion

The practice educator and clinical placement co-ordinator shared and reflected on their experiences.

- The importance of a welcoming and positive learning culture within the NHS was seen
- The induction process highlighted the complexity of knowledge required before beginning an NHS placement. Pre-placement paperwork provided clear expectations of the student role
- Use of the student uniform provided a unique experience for the co-ordinator. Although the co-ordinator's actual role was not withheld from patients, the student uniform meant that the patients viewed their abilities differently.

This knowledge has informed University Practice Educator training sessions and pre-placement briefings for students. This is been especially meaningful during the current climate where practice based learning opportunities have been impacted by the Covid pandemic.

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Figure 1: Student assisting practice educator on taking a cast