

THE STUDENT PHARMACIST EXPERIENCE OF ENHANCED CLINICAL PLACEMENTS [6ER-019]



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Background and importance

The Master of Pharmacy degree at the University of Brighton has a long history of providing innovative and cutting-edge clinical placements to our undergraduate and postgraduate pharmacy students. During placements, students are exposed to working clinical environments and provided with an opportunity to develop their confidence in using the clinical skills they learn in the classroom.

The role of a pharmacist is ever-expanding with an increasing need for the provision of enhanced health services, and with the General Pharmaceutical Council's (GPhC) recent announcement for 'prescribing ready' pharmacy graduates expected in 2025, Health Education England (HEE) has, this year, broadening the clinical tariff for education providers to include pharmacy education giving us an opportunity to enhance the clinical placements we run.

This HEE-funded pilot project looked to create and assess the capacity to provide in-depth clinical placements which would cover standards of practice that will be expected of future students (including clinical decision-making and prescribing) and has enabled us to test the infrastructure of several placement providers across Sussex within primary care (GP and community), and secondary (hospital) care.

The pilot placement model offers a number of innovative approaches to the acquisition, development, and use of prescribing and clinical skills by students in a patient-facing environment. These approaches include a blended pre-placement induction program, a shift from a passive learning experience to active involvement in clinical processes, a post-placement conference to share experiences and facilitate peer learning, and offering a flipped learning approach for missed lecture material whilst on placement.

These Enhanced Clinical Placements (ECP) were predominantly in a patient-facing environment (5-days) under the primary supervision of a prescriber, with a pre-placement induction (15 hours of blended learning) consisting of simulated clinical activities, and a post-placement conference (1 day). During the placement, students had the opportunity to develop an extended range of clinical skills and observe and discuss the prescribing decisions made by their prescribing supervisor which are currently outside the scope of the pharmacy degree.

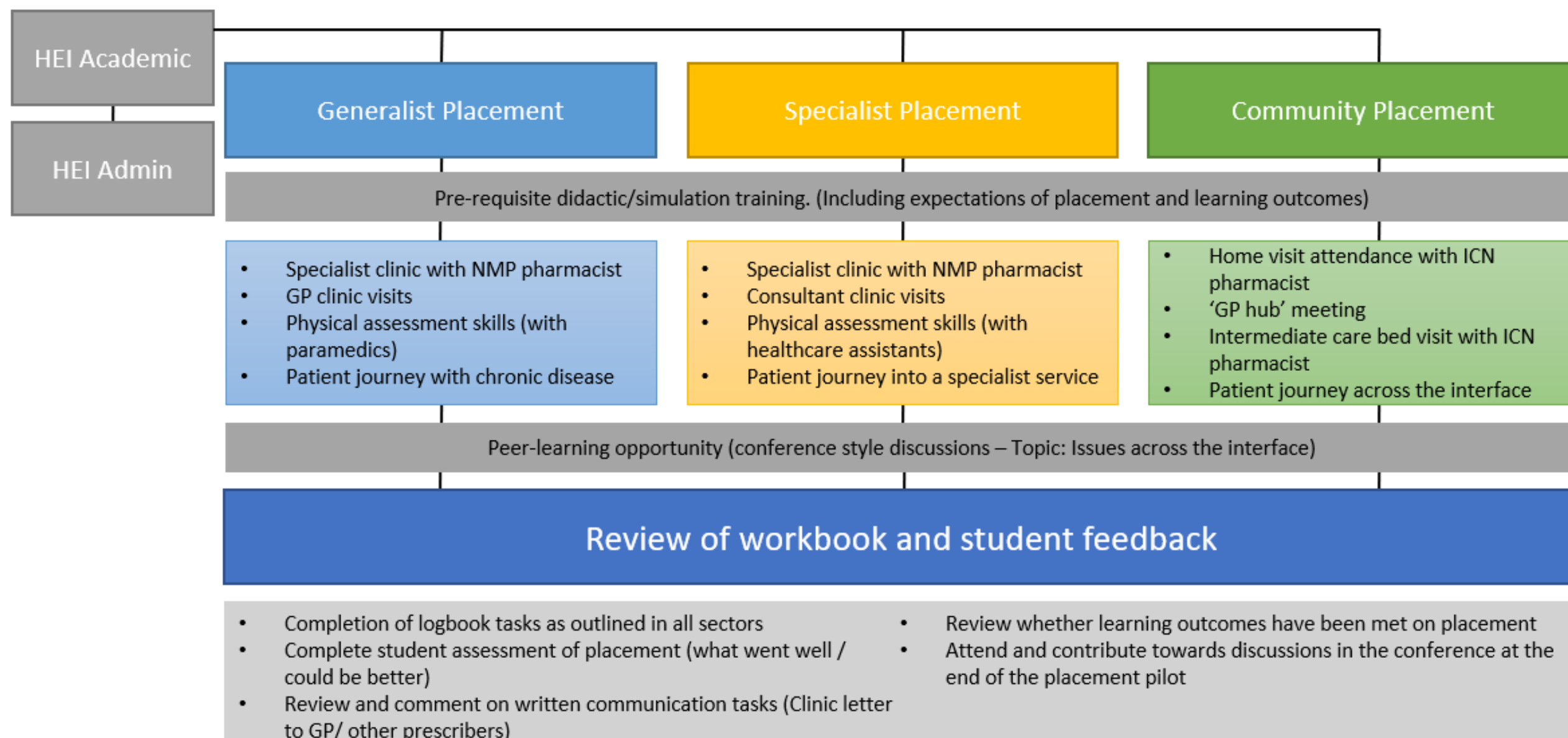


Aim and objectives

The aim of this project was to assess the overall experience students had on an ECP over a variety of clinical settings.

Materials and methods

As part of the 'end-of-year conference' students who attended an ECP were invited to participate in one of two focus groups. They were asked questions on how the placements went, what was good and what could be improved, they were also asked about any challenges on the placement. The two focus groups were transcribed and independently coded with themes identified by two researchers before cross-referencing and agreeing on themes.



Results

There were a total of 39 final year (level 7) students who volunteered to complete the ECP throughout the year with a 49% (n=19) return rate at the end-of-year conference and focus groups. Four main themes emerged from the data, which were named Variety, Consolidation of prior learning, Professional identity, and Logistics. Students expressed an appreciation for the ECP in providing them with additional clinical experience over a wider variety of settings than they had seen before. There was a recognition that the ECP helped to consolidate learning they had gained on the taught courses and that it heightened their professional identity but students also raised some areas for improvement in terms of the general logistics of the placement.

Feedback from the placement providers was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the benefit of more engaged placements for undergraduate pharmacists. Students were enthusiastic, and able to show clear engagement with the multidisciplinary team (MDT) and patients plus developed clinical skills without significant burden on the team(s).

Variety

This theme highlights the students' appreciation for the variety of experiences throughout the placement.

'I enjoyed that there were a lot of different things. Every day was slightly different.' with a number of students highlighting, when referring to GP practice that they were 'seeing an area of pharmacy [I] hadn't seen before'.

There was also an appreciation for seeing how different practitioners work '2 or 3 doctors, a phlebotomist and a physiotherapist and a GP pharmacist... until then I really didn't have an idea of what the GP pharmacist did' and also a variety of patient types such as 'asylum seekers, the homeless, housebound patients...'

This theme highlights the chance students have had to consolidate the taught material into practice.

Consolidation

Being able to put learning into practice on real patients - 'put me in the room with a patient to do the consultation... [I] didn't expect that but it was a good experience to learn that way as that is how medical students learn'. This idea of exposing students to challenging situations and asking in-depth questions allowed them to 'improve [my] clinical knowledge and solidify the basics'.

Logistics

This theme highlights a number of logistical hurdles and challenges to the ECP.

Students struggled with the distance between placements and 'getting there and back was quite difficult' with one student stating that they 'can imagine if [I] didn't drive then [I] would have struggled to get there'.

Another key aspect of logistics was the idea of managing time and last-minute changes and how this was communicated. One student stated 'this was more personalised on what we wanted to do and experience and hence why we needed to have good communication'.

It was also highlighted that students 'saw doctors prescribe but did not really see a pharmacist prescribe' as they were either 'a new prescriber' or stated they 'did not feel they had the right support to prescribe'. Further to this, there was a lack of 'explain why a specific medication was prescribed' to aid decision-making processes for the students.

This theme shows the importance of professional identity for students as they progress through their programme of

Identity

'They made me feel really involved and asked my opinion' and were 'asking for advice on certain things which made [me] feel that [I] were part of the team and almost a pharmacist'. It was also useful to have a closer working relationship with pharmacy technicians with a reciprocal relationship where one student stated 'they relied on me as well as me relying on them'.



Conclusion and relevance

The ECP was a good opportunity for students to learn at the edge of their comfort zone, offering a wide range of experiences, and helped to promote and understand professional value and role within an MDT. Through thematic analysis a number of key themes were identified which were 'Variety', 'Consolidation', 'Logistics', and 'Professional Identity'. Feedback from the placement providers was also overwhelmingly positive.

Future implementation needs to consider the level of standardisation between placements and the importance of clear expectations for the students and the providers. This should include travel, communication, and expected patient cohorts with a tailored induction process.

References

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Abbreviations

GPhC	General Pharmaceutical Council
HEE	Health Education England
ECP	Enhanced Clinical Placement
MDT	Multidisciplinary Team
GP	General practice
HCA	Healthcare Assistant
ICN	Integrated Care Network

