

Editorial: Practice-based learning amidst a time of uncertainty

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Who would have thought that when the second issue of this journal was published this year, many of us would still be working remotely? The challenge of continuing with tertiary education programmes during a global pandemic has led to many courses being offered purely online. However, of necessity, education programmes for the health and social care professions have to include sufficient opportunities for students to acquire experience in real practice contexts. The changed way in which the higher education sector has been forced to operate has certainly been challenging for educators and students alike, and indeed, for all stakeholders internationally. Educators have had to re-think practice-based learning, and invent novel ways in which students can continue to learn despite restricted client contact, yet which will equip them with the knowledge and skills to practice safely in placements. All while mitigating the risks associated with spreading the virus.

The ubiquity and significance of COVID-19 to our sector is reflected in the enthusiasm with which our calls were met, first for editors and then for contributions, to a Special Issue of the journal for publication in 2021. *Rising to the challenge: Policy, practice and partnership in developing practice-based learning during the COVID-19 pandemic* is being edited by Dr Linda Martindale, Professor Maggie Bartlett and Dr Stella Howden of the University of Dundee, UK, and Alison Jones of Kingston University and St George's University of London, UK. From a very large number of expressions of interest, potential contributions have been shortlisted which represent a range of professional backgrounds, countries, and responses to these challenging circumstances. Our guest editors will monitor progress and support authors through the coming year. Should you wish to act as a peer reviewer for the special issue, or for our standard submissions, please contact me.

Turning back to the current issue. The articles in this issue address four main themes, all of which have relevance in the context of COVID-19. These themes are: online simulation, stakeholder perspectives of practice-based learning, placement quality, and the transition from student to qualified professional.

Lee *et al.*'s article is timely in the current context, as simulation can offer an alternative to real practice-based learning placements as a way of preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus. They investigate the feasibility and effectiveness of an online cultural simulation activity for speech pathology students. The results were encouraging, despite the small sample size, and suggest that an online simulation activity may be a feasible way of increasing cultural empathy.

Three studies explore different stakeholder perspectives of practice-based learning. Bennion *et al.* describe stressors and coping strategies of physiotherapy students during their clinical placements. Their

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findings may guide practice educators in identifying students who potentially require support in managing stress. Bourne *et al.* explore speech pathology clinicians' perceptions on how students impact their (clinicians') work, and the factors that potentially contribute to this. Students were seen to both positively and negatively impact clinical and non-clinical activities, but to have negative impacts on clinicians' stress levels. They conclude that further research is required to provide guidance in supporting student clinical placements. In the context of international service learning programmes in low-resourced settings, Crawford *et al.* explore local partner perspectives regarding the benefits of this type of placement. Reported benefits included skill and knowledge exchange, improved assessment and intervention strategies, and better service quality. Areas for improvement included better leveraging of local partner strengths and perspectives, greater collaboration to prepare for the placements, and more regular communication.

Pit *at al.* address the quality of placements for allied health students. They investigate the reliability and validity of an instrument, the Placement Quality Survey (PQS), in a sample of occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech therapy students in rural placements. Their results support the reliability and validity of the PQS. The authors conclude that the PQS can contribute to improving student experiences and learning outcomes in rural placements, and that it can be used as a way of systematically evaluating the quality of placements.

Lastly, Harvey-Lloyd and Morris explore the transition process of radiography graduates into employment. The structured support programmes provided to this group failed to engage these Generation Z graduates in the process of transitioning into the role of a diagnostic radiographer. The authors propose an alternative, holistic model of preceptorship that combines skills and competence development, supporting transition, and personal and professional development.

It is encouraging that despite the many frustrations and uncertainty we are facing globally as a result of COVID-19, we are nevertheless finding ways of ensuring that we can continue to equip students to be effective practitioners within the health and social care environment.

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