

Editorial: The Refreshingly ‘New Normal’ of Practice Education?

*Lynn Clouder^a

a: Coventry University, United Kingdom

The COVID-19 pandemic had a lot to answer for having sent the entire world reeling. It has taken some time to fully understand and reflect on its impact on individuals, systems and processes, many of which will never be the same again. In a lot of cases, this is quite possibly a very good thing not least in the context of practice education. This issue of the journal seems to capture a certain post-pandemic sense of thinking and doing things differently. For decades the same models and systems stood the test of time but necessity has challenged everyone to think outside-of-the-box, to think differently, and thereby support students and newly qualified professionals to function in diverse and less certain, and structured circumstances than previously.

The issue opens with an article by Lucy Wallis, Rachel Locke, Steven Ryall and Beverley Hardon (2023) on what motivates people to choose a career in the allied health professions. This scoping review, motivated by the perceived need to grow the allied health profession workforce, found patchy evidence across professions and identifies the need for further investigation around career motivations, sources of influence, and barriers for all AHPs. Maybe COVID-19 will have changed perceptions and motivations but only time and further research will tell.

The review is followed by several articles that all differ in substantive focus and professional context yet have a similar thread in that they discuss alternatives to traditional practice models in a variety of ways. Jamie Liddell, Eleanor Izzard, Sarah Elliott and Georgia Loft (2023) explore an occupational therapy apprenticeship programme from the students’ perspective. The authors point out that despite apprenticeships being seen as a successful means of obtaining nationally recognised qualifications through workplace training there is still very limited evaluation of such programmes. This article provides useful insight into the importance of clear communication and management of expectations between stakeholders, effective induction processes, and a commitment to supporting mentors and workplace teams within the clinical arena.

The following three articles all focus on medical education. The first of these discusses the views of nurse faculty training medical students to be Health Care Assistants. Kishan Patel, Simon Gay, Richard Holland and Elizabeth Anderson (2023) explain that in many cases medical training fails to offer early clinical patient contact and that this can be detrimental to effective transition into practice. They share insight into the experiences and perceptions of nurse-led faculty who led a pilot study for first year medical students seeking to address early learning of basic skills through completion of the UK Care Certificate (CC).

*Corresponding Author: Professor Lynn Clouder, Institute Director, Institute for Global Education, Coventry University, Priory Street, CV1 5FB United Kingdom
Email: l.clouder@coventry.ac.uk

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A further article focuses on medical education but takes us to Indonesia to discuss a Community Medicine Clerkship that occurred during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The authors Dwi Tyastuti, Risahmawati Risahmawati, Marita Fadhillah, Fika Ekayanti, Sity Kunarisasi, and Ahmad A. Habibi (2023) share the changes that had to be made to the clerkship programme aimed at producing primary care doctors. The clerkship that is usually situated in community Health Centers had to be adapted in an attempt to provide alternative experiences online.

Returning to the UK, Elizabeth Anderson, Daniel Kinnair, Jenny Ford, Lucy Bleazard and Steve Malcherczy (2023) report on a student-volunteering project in a medical school, involving working with homeless people. Designed to align social accountability responsibilities with healthcare curricula, the project found that the experience was effective in changing attitudes and understandings of homelessness and social injustice amongst students. In addition, the student-staff-community partnership was deemed to offer an ethical platform on which to build sustainable local outreach projects.

The idea of doing things differently is also the focus of Lisa Ford's (2023) article exploring how child nursing students learn about end of life care through simulation. In a difficult aspect of nursing characterised by anxiety and feelings of inadequacy, simulation is presented as an ideal pedagogical strategy that can help students to develop their end of life care skills. The study concludes that effective learning is facilitated when students feel prepared, safe and supported within a comfortable and authentic simulation environment. Effective and supportive facilitation is influential. Therefore facilitators need to have the competence and confidence to design and implement simulation activities and engage students in learning.

Mark Taylor, Elizabeth Folarin and Alex Greenchester (2023) switch professional focus to social care and social work education sharing an article on the impact on two practising social workers' experiences of teaching social work students in a university setting. The research demonstrates how practicing social workers who teach social work students in a university setting also benefit and learn from these encounters since it leads to recognition of the depth of their social work experiences leading to strengthening of their self-efficacy and contributed to their continuing professional development.

The final article in this issue by Helen Meldrum and Mary Hardy (2023) takes us to the USA to discuss a model to support the development of communication skills. Based on the challenges in communication about COVID medical risks, the authors present a speculative four-quadrant model that they suggest may inform clinical educators in preparing themselves and students to converse with COVID patients and their families that could also have wider applicability in the event of future medical risks.

We anticipate that there is something for everyone in this current journal issue. It has always been the case that what is established practice in one profession or in one country, can be new for others. However, it feels like what we hope is a post-pandemic period provides opportunity for a major rethink of how practice education works to prepare new health and social care professionals for the future whatever it might hold. Maybe we will never reach a new normal, and maybe that's a good thing.

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