

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR PLACEMENTS

Information you need to avoid the pitfalls

Introduction

Your practice placements are a valuable part of your nursing studies. Practice placements allow you to undertake clinical practice under supervision. It also provides you with opportunities to work with a mentor, enabling you to reach the required levels in learning outcomes and competencies.

UNISON wants you to get the most from your placements and this guide aims to provide you with the sort of information you need to avoid the pitfalls.

How to make the most of your learning opportunities

It is important that you take full advantage of the opportunities that your placement offers, and that you make the most of this – it will stand you in very good stead when you qualify.

Do your homework – find out in advance what type of placement you will be doing and do some background reading about where you will be working.

You should always be prepared to take responsibility for your own learning.

Maintain good communications with your mentor so you can make them aware of any support needs you may have.

Always try to remember that your mentor has other responsibilities in the workplace and be aware of that when you are dealing with them.

View every day of your clinical placement as a potential learning opportunity and stay motivated and enthusiastic.

If you do all this then you should be in a good position to get the most out of your placement.

Preparation

- Be prepared—know where and when you are expected to be. Your placements can be in a variety of settings. If you have a community placement then you can prepare by planning your travel route carefully, making sure you arrive on time. It's always a good idea to check the uniform criteria for non-acute placements. Always find out before your placement is due to start.
- Don't be late on your first day.
- Try to make a point of introducing yourself to all of the staff—small steps like this make a big difference.
- Be prepared to ask questions and have a list ready—these could include the following:
 - What are your expectations of me?
 - What are the most important things for me to achieve?
 - Where are the procedures and policies kept?
 - When and how often will you be working with me? (If the mentor is not available you need to ask which other members of the team will be).
 - What are the lines of communication both formal and informal? eg what do I do if I am unwell, who do I tell?

Clinical placements— other useful bits

Make the most of your placements.

If you are undertaking a surgical placement ask to follow a patient through from admission to discharge, include within this the surgery and recovery unit. In a medical unit you can still follow a patient through a scan or their other treatments, this will help to give you an overview of the condition.

Find out where the emergency trolley is, what the fire and resus numbers are; remember, some fire numbers may differ from organisation to organisation.

If there is down time at any point, ask if there is anything you can do, try to offer to help others as teamwork is vital.

Sickness absence

If you are absent from work due to sickness you need to contact both your university and placement area. If you intend to be absent for more than 3 days you will need to complete a self-certification form. If you are likely to be absent for longer than 7 days you will need to contact the university. Each establishment has clear guidelines on sickness absence, it is important to make the university aware of any difficulties you are experiencing. Furthermore, if the university requires you to attend meetings to discuss your absence you need to make your local UNISON representative aware.

Problems with supervision:

if you experience a problem with the supervision inform your link tutor and

mentor. If you have concerns about the standard of care again discuss with your mentor or course personal tutor. If you feel uncomfortable speaking to any of the above contact your local UNISON representative or UNISONdirect on 0845 355 0845, you will be able to speak to them on a confidential basis, gain advice and support on the best course of action for you.

Also remember, student nurses cannot be left unsupervised while on a placement. You must not be included in the staffing numbers, as a student nurse you are placed on a ward or other area in order to achieve learning outcomes not to make up the numbers.

Unsocial hours

Many students have complained about the requirement to work weekends, nights and bank holidays. UNISON's view is that while it is important for students to gain experience of patient care through the 24 hours of care this should, at all times, be reasonable. You should expect to work with your mentor and on occasions this may include unsociable hours working. Discuss the issue with your mentor; if you find you are working excessive unsociable hours raise this with your mentor and try to reach an agreement, however, if you find you are working too many hours raise this with your local UNISON representative.

Expectations of me as a student

As a student you should not undertake any role which is beyond your competencies.

You should not undertake any role or procedure that you have not been fully prepared for nor had the appropriate supervision. As a student you are expected to uphold the Nursing and Midwifery Council professional code of conduct, however you can only be held to your level of expertise and knowledge.

However there is a student code of conduct, which you should uphold and which the university will use to judge your conduct. nmc-uk.org/Documents/Guidance/Guidance-on-professional-conduct-for-nursing-and-midwifery-students.pdf

Working as a Health Care Assistant

Refer to university policy.

Bullying and harassment

Workplace bullying can be defined as persistent negative attacks, which are “unacceptable, offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting humiliating behaviour, abuse of power or authority, which attempts to undermine an individual or group of employees”.

Harassment can be defined as conduct, which is unwanted and offensive and affects the dignity of an individual or group of individuals. Whether the harassment is intentional or not is irrelevant: the key point is that it is offensive and may be unlawful.

If you experience any incidents of bullying, harassment, violence or abuse, or witness them happening to a colleague, you must report it.

Every placement will have their staff policies on bullying and harassment - your mentor will know where these are.

UNISON has negotiated policies and procedures to deal with bullying and harassment and violence at work. If you are affected please report to local UNISON steward or UNISONdirect on 0845 355 0845. Also raise it with your link lecturer and personal tutor.

What will happen if I am deferred on a module?

Try not to panic. If this happens it must be assumed that a possible failure may occur. You should have been made aware of any development needs earlier in your placement. However, if this did not happen or you did not receive a mid-point interview or feedback you should request additional time to address your development needs.

Students may need to retake a module for all sorts of reasons, it is, however, important that you flag up any issues or concerns regarding your placement at the earliest opportunity. Speak to your mentor, if this does not achieve a successful outcome and you remain concerned you should raise the issue with the ward manager and then the university. Your placements are an opportunity for you to develop your skills and competencies, if anything occurs which has an impact on the success of this you need to speak out.

You also need to seek support from your link and personal tutor. You should refer to your student handbook and to your local UNISON representative or UNISONdirect on 0845 355 0845.

It is really important that you speak to your UNISON representative as soon as possible, they will be able to offer you support and guidance.

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