Bournemouth University
School of Health and Social Care

Getting the Most from your Practice Placement – A Guide for Students Who Need Support in Practice

Students on health care and social work professional pre-qualifying programmes spend considerable periods in practice placements as part of their course and are normally supported by a qualified practitioner during this time (such as a Mentor or Practice Assessor). Their role is to teach, guide, support, answer questions and generally help to unlock the learning opportunities available. It is a rewarding and, at times, challenging role in busy environments. Most practitioners do an excellent job of helping students to learn but there are occasions when the relationship doesn’t go as well as would be ideal. Hopefully you will be able to discuss this in your placement with your assessor, the placement link or the educational link. If you are unsure how to do this then this guidance outlines the options and opportunities available to address issues constructively, including strategies to use and details of who is available to support you.

What are the Options and Opportunities?

- A problem shared is a problem halved- if you just need to download to a confidential source, you can talk to SUBU Advice who will listen, offer you approaches that you can use to help you reflect on your situation and prepare your own action plan. They can also help you access further support if required.

- If you are experiencing problems that are affecting your learning or ability to get your assessment signed off- you can contact your Academic Adviser who will also talk through approaches open to you, including aspects of the practice environment, sharing relevant insights as a health or social care professional, to help you develop your action plan.

- If you and your Academic Adviser have agreed an action plan that fails to address the issues, the academic adviser can contact the designated practice link from the University (such as the University Practice Learning Adviser or Link Midwifery Lecturer) who can:
  - Talk to the Education Link or Lead for your placement
  - Visit the practice area to facilitate an interaction with you and your mentor/practice assessor

- If you are very concerned about a quality of care issue, you can use the ‘Placement Concerns Protocol’ and refer to guidance from your professional regulatory body. You will also need to alert your Academic Adviser and/or the Programme Leader of your concern.

- You may want to consider if you could benefit from the support of the Additional Learning Support team. Many students readily access this team for input but not always for support in managing additional learning needs in the practice setting.

- All of the above options will incorporate strategies to help you to take responsibility for identifying the issues and generating solutions. This approach will help you develop your skills and resilience, giving you transferable skills that will support you in your professional career. These life coaching approaches are a resource you can use independently and expect when accessing any of the options available to support you to gain the most from your practice experiences.
• Make full use of opportunities to evaluate your placement learning experiences (such as completing the online placement evaluation or participating in reflective practice activities). Meaningful engagement with these processes will help you to reflect on key aspects of placement while assisting you to develop your professional responsibility to review practice. However, don’t wait until you have to evaluate your placement to express concerns – the mechanisms above will maximise the opportunity to turn what could be a negative experience into a learning opportunity.

Empowering You to Find Solutions - Life Coaching Tips

There are a series of questions that you can consider to help unpack your particular problem, defining it clearly, considering possible courses of action, trying them out and evaluating their effectiveness thus turning what could be a negative experience into a learning opportunity. It will help in developing new skills and resilience in the hectic practice environment that may be useful throughout your professional career.

Some basic principles that could be useful in moving things forward include:

• Solving a problem is part of learning, and will build capacity to solve similar problems in the future
• Breaking the problem down into parts is part of the solution

It is important that you focus on your behaviours as well as the practitioner’s behaviours in analysing the situation and think about things you might be doing that contribute it. For example:

Are you well prepared for the placement (undertaken some studying and background reading about the patients/ clients/ women you might encounter)?

Do you have your assessment documents well organised and ready?

Could you clarify when is the best time to ask questions so that they can be answered without impeding the delivery of care?

There are four stages in a useful coaching approach referred to as ‘GROW’ and thinking these through may help you to clarify how best to move forward. They are:

• Goal – where do you want to get to?
• Reality – what is your current position?
• Options – What could you do?
• Way forward – What will you do?

This series of questions (for you to ask yourself) all start with interrogatives. These ‘Who’, ‘What’, ‘How’, ‘When’, ‘Where’ questions leave the responsibility with you to start to find your own solution to your placement issue. Asking questions which start with verbs (Do you think...? Could you try...?) take the responsibility away from you and don’t help you to develop your own skills for dealing with complicated situations. A key tenet of a life coaching approach is to leave responsibility with you, so you can achieve the best outcome in the situation.
It can also be helpful if you really think about how far you have travelled in seeking an answer, and useful questions include:

- What have you tried so far?
- What has been the result?
- What else could you try?

The strategies above may be enough to guide you to a plan. If not, there is a set of questions that focus much more specifically on the issues of interaction with another person, in this instance, your assessor in practice.

- What are the issues with your assessor?
- What would you like the interactions to be like?
- What strategies have you tried so far? What happened? How did other people respond?
- What would a neutral observer have thought?
- What could you now do to improve relationships? What else?
- What are your strongest social skills?
- Which of these could you use?
- Which social situations do you find most challenging?
- What could you do that would make any of these challenging situations easier to deal with?
- Who could you talk to who might be able to help you?

Give these questions a score from 1-10 in terms of how far they could enable you to make progress. Then think through how best to proceed, having considered what the key issues are in the relationship and how you might modify your behaviour, based on what you have tried already and what else is open to you.

Finally decide:

- Which of these options are you committed to trying?
- When will you take the first step? How committed are you to taking this step?
- How will you decide if the approach is working?
- Who would it be useful to tell about your plans?

**Useful Resources**

Educational links for the placement – available on Placements on the Web (POW)

Your Academic Adviser

SUBU: subuadvice@bournemouth.ac.uk

Bournemouth House: (BG07, next to the SUBU shop) - Monday to Friday 09:30–14:00 (closed Wednesdays; appointment only during vacations) Tel. - 01202 967369

Poole House: (P255, above Dylan's Bar) - Monday to Friday 09:30–16:30 all year round. Tel. - 01202 965779

Ask questions *anonymously* by texting 07501 622462

AskBU / Additional learning support / Placement Concerns Protocol