

An evaluation of Practice Supervisor training for final year healthcare students in the United Kingdom

ABSTRACT.

Practice Supervisors are fundamental in the development and upskilling of the future workforce in healthcare. This article outlines a new initiative for one higher education institution who integrated practice supervisor training into their curriculum for third year students across several healthcare programmes. The training consisted of two pre-recorded sessions which were delivered by the student's personal tutors. A final face to face session was then facilitated, where students were supported to consolidate their learning and build upon their knowledge. Evaluation data was collected via an anonymous questionnaire. In total, 352 questionnaires were completed. Data was managed and analyzed using descriptive statistics on EXCEL. The qualitative comments received were collated and analyzed using simple thematic framework analysis. Most attendees found the content and the delivery of the programme and their opportunity for discussions to be good, very good or excellent showing overall that *Content* was positively evaluated by 98.4% of attendees, *Delivery* at 97.4% and *Opportunity for discussion* at 97.9%. The evaluation data results show that practice supervisor preparation can be effectively delivered when located in the final year for undergraduate health care students. The importance of the content being interactive and allowing for plenty of opportunities for group discussions has been highlighted by the feedback.

INTRODUCTION.

This paper describes and discusses the implementation of a practice supervisor preparation and training programme for final year undergraduate health care students in Adult, Child and Young Persons and Mental Health Nursing, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Paramedic Sciences and Operating Department Practice. A practice supervisor is defined as a role which supports and supervises learners within the practice environment (NMC 2018). There is currently a dearth of published literature describing the implementation of practice supervisor preparation in the United Kingdom (UK) for this group of students and this paper sets out to partially cover this gap. The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) (2018) state that Practice Supervisor training must be integrated into the pre-registration curriculum as this will help prepare newly qualified nurses to take on the supervision role. Rowbotham and Owen (2015) acknowledge that supervisors are essential to the functioning of student supervision, and should support students by offering suggestions for improvement, identify strengths and limitation, communicate expectations, give positive reinforcement, and correct, without belittling them. The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (2018) also asserts the need for students to be prepared appropriately for their role in supporting learners once qualified, meaning that all relevant newly qualified practitioners require appropriate preparation in the final year of their undergraduate studies. The practice supervisor preparation programme described here addresses this need as it provides final year students with the skills and knowledge to embark on the role of practice supervisor when qualified and to also allow further development throughout their career. It is

identified that key skills, such as delegation, teaching, facilitating, advocating, supporting, and providing timely feedback are fundamental in the practice supervisor role (NMC 2018; Stainer et al 2022).

PRACTICE SUPERVISOR TRAINING PROGRAMME.

The Practice Supervisor training programme (Diagram 1) was delivered throughout the final academic year for students. It was facilitated by their personal tutors to the student groups, which were on average 40 students in each cohort. The content consisted of two pre-recorded voiceover powerpoints which were an hour duration each. Students, in groups, reviewed the NMC (2018) and HCPC (2018) standards, which identifies and defines the practical roles of a practice supervisor and practice assessor. These sessions also covered the importance of placement induction, learning styles required and an explanation of the interview process. A final three-hour group session which was face to face was facilitated by a member of the University Practice Learning Adviser team (UPLA), whose role is specifically to support practice in this way. The students were encouraged to consolidate their learning on the programme and build upon their knowledge by engaging in relevant case studies, that were aimed at enabling students to better understand all the requirements of the Practice Supervisor role, through guided reflection.

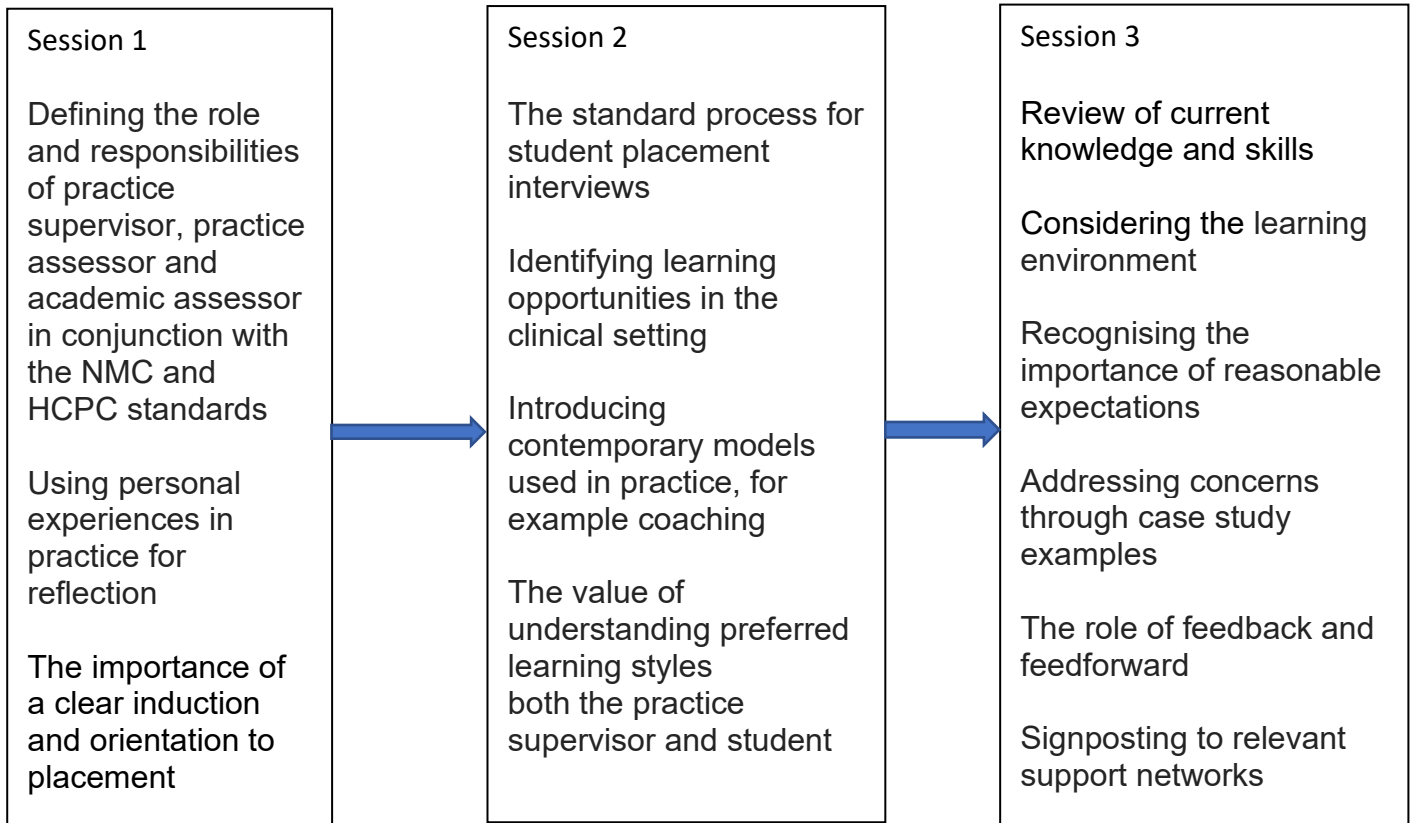


Diagram 1: Content of the training sessions

EVALUATION METHODS.

Evaluation data was collected by way of a short questionnaire issued upon completion of the final session of the programme, all attendees were invited to complete the questionnaire anonymously and return their completions to the UPLA team member who conducted the final session. A total of 352 questionnaires were distributed to the entire population of attendees on the training programme. Each evaluation was returned directly to the UPLA team member at the end of the session. This evaluation data was collected as a natural consequence of the programme delivery (i.e., routine programme evaluation data)

and so formal university ethical approval was not required (Bournemouth University 2021). The evaluation data was however collected in line with the General Data Protection Regulations (Data Protection Act 2018) and was exclusively anonymous. Questions included 4 Likert scale statements with 5 response options covering the content and delivery of the session, materials used, opportunity to participate in group discussions and a statement asking attendees to rate how well the programme has prepared them for taking on the role of the Practice Supervisor. The questionnaire also included an open question asking attendees if they had any qualitative comments about the programme that they wished to make. All Likert response options were coded 0 to 5; with 0 being the most negative and 5 being the most positive response. Data was managed and analyzed using descriptive statistics on EXCEL (V 16.68) summarizing responses to each question for all attendees, this included overall responses and group comparisons. As this is programme evaluation it was not appropriate to use inferential statistical analysis. The qualitative comments received were collated and analyzed using simple thematic framework analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006).

RESULTS.

Questionnaire responses for the whole group are presented in Table 1: the variation in responses for each question (Range = 344-352) is due to some attendees not completing all the questions.

	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good	Excellent
The content of the training materials. (N = 352)	3 (0.9%)	2 (0.6%)	114 (32%)	146 (41.4%)	87 (25%)
The delivery of the sessions (N = 350)	5 (1.4%)	4 (1.1%)	99 (28.3%)	139 (39.7%)	103 (29.4%)
The opportunity to participate in group discussions. (N = 344)	3 (0.9%)	4 (1.2%)	87 (25.2%)	144 (41.9%)	106 (30.8%)
	Very underprepared	Underprepared	Not Sure	Well Prepared	Very Well Prepared
Following the training, how well prepared do you feel for taking on the role of a practice supervisor. (N = 347)	1 (0.3%)	6 (1.7%)	50 (14.4%)	221 (63.7%)	69 (19.9%)

Table 1: All questionnaire responses (N = 344-352)

Table 1 shows that overall, most attendees found the content and the delivery of the programme and their opportunity for discussions to be good, very good or excellent

showing overall that *Content* was positively evaluated by 98.4% of attendees, *Delivery* at 97.4% and *Opportunity for discussion* at 97.9%. Table 1 also shows the sense of preparedness the attendees felt after completing the programme with 83.6% (N = 290) stating they felt well or very well prepared for the role of the practice supervisor. 14.4% (N = 50) of attendees were not sure, with another 2% (N = 7) stating they did not feel well enough prepared.

For the 7 professional groups, the breakdown of scores for the content, delivery and opportunity for group discussions were similar and so are not reported here. However, the question about *how well attendees felt prepared for taking on the role of the practice supervisor* for each of the 7 professional groups (including the 3 distinct fields of nursing) is presented in Table 2. This shows the variation in how well each group felt prepared for the practice supervisor role, with the overall majority feeling well prepared, except the Mental Health Nurses group who do show a slightly different trend. The 'Not Sure' response for each group identifies where uncertainties are, with most groups (except Children and Young Persons), having a noticeable number of students (group range 9-25%) who would have benefited from more clarity of role within the programme.

Profession	Very underprepared	Underprepared	Not Sure	Well Prepared	Very Well Prepared
Adult Nurses (N = 202)	0	2 (0.1%)	28 (13.9%)	128 (63.4%)	44 (21.8%)

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Children and Young Persons Nurses (N = 17)	0	0	1 (5.9%)	14 (82.4%)	2 (11.8%)
Mental Health Nurses (N = 28)	1 (3.6%)	3 (10.7%)	7 (25%)	12 (42.8%)	5 (17.9%)
Occupational Therapy (N = 21)	0	0	4 (19%)	12 (57.1%)	5 (23.8%)
Paramedics (N = 27)	0	1 (3.7%)	5 (18.5%)	19 (70.3%)	2 (7.4%)
Physiotherapy (N = 33)	0	0	3 (9%)	23 (69.7%)	7 (21.2%)
Operating Department Practitioners (N = 19)	0	0	2 (10.5%)	13 (68.4%)	4 (21%)

Table 2: Professional Group responses to their sense of preparedness for the practice supervisor role after completing the programme.

All 352 evaluations were individually reviewed, focusing primarily on the qualitative comments. Large categories were created and common themes within the comments were identified. These were then filtered into smaller categories, with the three themes included. These were content, delivery and presentation, which can be seen in table 3. The core

principles of a thematic analysis framework were used to guide this process (Braun & Clarke 2006).

Content	Delivery	Presentation
Helpful videos	Interactive +++	Informative +++
More case studies	Very well delivered	Well presented
Good overview	Engaging	Engaging presenters
Useful understanding	Group work	Interactive
Enjoyed group discussion	More interactive activities	Good presentation of materials
Personal experiences	Smaller groups	Interesting
Reflective opportunities	Delivery in one day	Good overview of the role
More tools in conflict resolution	Reduce repetition	
Motivational strategies		

Table 3: Themes identified by qualitative comments.

Content

The first theme that was identified was the content of the training. Students indicated that the videos, case studies and group discussions were beneficial and enhanced their learning. Other students also stated that reflecting on personal experiences and discussing these was of great benefit. This was substantiated by further comments which included that students valued the regular opportunity to reflect during the training.

“All content covered was relevant and further adds to the skills needed to be a good supervisor”

“The content was very informative”

“Case studies are quite helpful”

Feedback from students identified that the training could be developed further by including:

“More tools in conflict resolution or motivational tactics to use once qualified”

“Helpful if the first two sessions were closer to the final session, as it seems like ages ago that we did them”

Delivery

One of the themes identified was course delivery. Most students commented about how interactive the activities, which supported their learning. The group work exercises were particularly valuable for students. It was also noted that students felt that the face-to-face seminar was much more conducive to learning compared with the pre-recorded presentations.

“Good interactions and group discussions”

“Enjoyed the group work and chats, as it was good to hear other perspectives”

“More face-to-face session to engage better”

Students suggested that the seminars would benefit from smaller groups and requested consideration to reduce the seminar timeframes, to either one day or consecutive days. Some students found the consolidation section of seminar three, where we reviewed their learning to date, slightly repetitive and stated that it would be helpful to reduce the time spent on this activity.

“Smaller groups would have been more practical”

“The sessions were very informative but were very similar”

Presentation

The final theme identified was in relation to the presentation. Numerous students found the presentation informative, interactive, and engaging. Students also commented on how they found the presentation gave them a good understanding and overview of the Practice Supervisor role.

“The training was very informative; I feel as though I will take on these skills to improve the student experience”

“Good presentation and engaging presenters”

On the contrary, some students requested that more scenarios and interactive activities to be included to further support their learning.

“More interactive activities”

As shown in table 2, students were asked how well prepared they were to take on the role of Practice Supervisor after this training. On reviewing the comments, multiple students referred to the question asked above. Some students commented on either not feeling adequately prepared or overwhelmed in this part of their training.

“Don’t feel like this is top of our agenda right now when we are so overwhelmed at the moment”

“More beneficial once qualified feels overwhelming as a student”

Others felt that the responsibility to take on the Practice Supervisor role was slightly overwhelming for them, when they have only just qualified.

“Concerns regarding qualifying and being a supervisor straight away”

“Might be too much responsibility whilst we get used to the role”

However, most students felt prepared and identified that the training offered them the platform to be able to take on this role once qualified.

“Good idea to be ready qualified to help students”

“I feel better and more prepared”

“Excellent course, I will benefit by being aware of my possible future role of practice supervisor and assessor”

“Setting up a good foundation – knowledge for mentoring once qualified”

DISCUSSION.

The evaluation data results reported on here illustrate that practice supervisor preparation can be effectively delivered when located in the final year for undergraduate health care students in Adult, Child and Young Persons and Mental Health Nursing, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Paramedic Sciences and Operating Department Practice. This is consistent with the expectations of the NMC (2018) and HCPC (2018), who identify that Practice Supervisors need to be suitably prepared for the role and that there are expectations that healthcare students will gain understanding of supervision during their course.

Currently, there are no other comparable studies or literature that describes the process of implementing this training into pre-registration programmes. Therefore, from reviewing the curriculum it was deemed that this training is most appropriately placed within the final year and there is some benefit to providing this input whilst students are still actively engaged in their practice under their own practice supervision. This will help establish a degree of continuity of experience as students can draw from real and meaningful experiences of their own supervision to better understand this process as well as begin forming insights into their own future role as a supervisor. This would include effective communication of expectations, positive reinforcement of strengths and areas for improvement in a supportive supervision role as described by Rowbotham and Owen (2015). However, it is recognised from the student feedback that this intensifies the pressure that they are under within their final year which needs to be considered. It is identified that reflection can be a key component in supporting students in their development and therefore, liaison with local organisations was completed to ensure there

is time allocated within their preceptorship programme and at induction to their post qualification roles.

The qualitative evaluation data revealed that content, delivery style and mode of presentation were felt to be the most important aspects for the attendees. It is recognized that training needs to evolve to meet the needs of the changing landscape of healthcare and support the next generation of healthcare professionals (Khurshid et al. 2020). The interactive activities embedded within the programme which the students found valuable and useful to their own learning were much more effective in person than through pre-recorded lectures or remote presentations.

Limitations to this study have been identified, which include the recognition of gaining feedback directly after the training, which does limit the time in allowing the students to reflect. This Practice Supervisor preparation programme evaluation has indicated specific areas for development on this programme that the programme facilitators have integrated this thinking into current and future programme deliveries.

- Inclusion of more tools for conflict resolution and self-motivation models in preparation for the forthcoming supervisor role.
- Smaller seminar groups of up to 25 attendees run over a shorter overall timescale of less than 3 months.

- Reduce repetition of content by streamlining the review process during the third seminar session.
- The inclusion of more interactive scenarios, based on real past events, to maximize the attendees' learning opportunities.
- Programme facilitators consider the timing and delivery of the programme for the attendees' own course schedule and avoid times when that might be intense.
- Consider a further study on student views on this training, post qualification.

CONCLUSION.

This study has identified how practice supervisor training has been implemented into the final year curriculum for healthcare students at one higher education institution. The findings from this evaluation identify that there is significant benefit in including this training. However, it is recognised that following the evaluation feedback adaptations to the programme is required, as identified above. This study adds to the field of the role of practice supervisor and the training, where there is currently very limited literature when reviewing this in the context of pre-registration training. Moving forward, it is acknowledged that further research would be beneficial. In particular, reviewing feedback at a later stage once students have qualified and are within a preceptorship period.

KEY WORDS

Practice supervision

Education

Nursing

NMC standards

Pre-registration

Allied Health Professions

KEY POINTS

- Correctly focused skills and knowledge are needed for effective preparation of Practice Supervisors.
- It is important to identify the right time in the programme for this training to be delivered to be effective.
- Supervisor education integrated into the curriculum is effective for students and newly qualified professionals.
- Our future workforce is better prepared to support learners in the workplace.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- What is the role of a Practice Supervisor?
- What key skills do you need to develop in your Practice Supervisor role?
- How can nurses who take on the role of a Practice Supervisor support practice education?
- How can implementing the Practice Supervisor training into the curriculum support the future workforce?

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