



Preparing for your clinical placement

Róisín O'Connell offers some practical tips about how to get the most out of your clinical placement and discusses the available support

AS THE academic year progresses, many first-year students will be preparing for their very first clinical placement. While going on your first placement can be an exciting experience, as you will finally be able to put what you have been learning in the classroom into practice, it is normal to feel a bit nervous as well. In this article I will look at some tips to help you to prepare for your first placement.

Preparation

Put your best foot forward. First impressions are important so make sure that you are well rested and punctual for your first day of placement. Plan your route to your placement site and remember to factor in time for traffic, difficulty finding a parking space or a late bus. It may be worth packing a lunch the night before and bringing a bottle of water for the first day, you can see what the canteen facilities are like after that when you are under less pressure.

The hallmark of a good nurse or midwife is always having a pen, so be sure to bring a spare. Make sure that you know what your higher education institute (HEI) and clinical placement site's uniform policy is and adhere to it closely. It is also important to be familiar with the local policy regarding sick leave in case you need to miss a placement day.

Learning on placement

While you will have learned a lot during your time in college, there will be a significant amount of information to take in while you are on placement. Don't be afraid to ask your preceptor questions and to take the initiative of asking to accompany them if they are going to perform a

task you would benefit from seeing.

You will also have a clinical placement co-ordinator (CPC) assigned to you who can answer any questions you might have as well. It is important to always have a small notebook with you in your pocket so that you can write down unfamiliar terms or medications that you can look up later. This is something that I found extremely useful when I was a student.

Many students find that protective reflective time (PRT) is an ideal opportunity to look up new terms heard in handover, or to research different medications, their indications for use and their side effects. All students should have time equivalent to a minimum of four hours per week of PRT, as per the NMBI Nursing/Midwifery Registration Programmes Standards and Requirements.

Know the policies and standards

When you are on placement it is important that you are aware of the various policies, guidelines and standards that are relevant to you as a student nurse or midwife.

Your HEI and clinical placement sites will have local policies, but the NMBI sets requirements, guidelines and standards that you must follow. These can be found at: www.nmbi.ie/Standards-Guidance

It is vital that you are aware of your code of conduct, the scope of practice, and domains of competence while on placement. Additionally, your college and clinical placement site will likely inform you of their social media policy, but it is worth bearing in mind that the NMBI also has a guidance document, also available at the web address above.

Seeking support on placement

While the support of the CPC and the preceptor in the clinical placement site are readily accessible, it can be easy to forget about other means of support available to you. Some students can feel isolated, overwhelmed, or anxious during clinical placement blocks as they feel removed from normal student life.

This is likely to happen more often as some HEIs take a blended approach to learning. Remember that while you are on placement you remain a student of your HEI and can avail of the support they offer, including health services, counselling services and guidance from your link lecturer or personal tutors.

In addition to support offered by your HEI, INMO members also have access to a 24-hour counselling helpline service, details available at: www.inmo.ie/membership_benefits

It is also important to keep in touch with your family and friends while on placement, as it really does make a difference. Especially if you are feeling lonely.

Finally, remember that the INMO is here to support you when you are on clinical placement. If you are experiencing issues during your placement or have a question, do not be afraid to get in touch. It is important that each class has an INMO rep who is connected with me, if your group does not have one then please discuss this and nominate one person to get in touch.

The very best of luck on your placement.

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