Learning through COVID19 : using digital technology to compare undergraduate clinical placement competency data, before and after the global pandemic

Abstract Text (500 words in total)

Purpose: What was the major reason for undertaking the project/sharing your activity? What was your aim and objectives?

The aim was to identify if reduced clinical placement hours as a result of Covid-19, negatively impacted on the acquisition of knowledge, skills and professional behaviours, as defined by the HCPC Standards of Proficiency for Physiotherapists (HCPC, 2020). The objective was to compare clinical placement performance data of two final year cohorts of undergraduate students; a 2019 cohort graduating before the pandemic and a 2020 cohort which was impacted by the pandemic. (72 words)

Methods: What principles, methods / methodological approaches, materials did you use?

The Physiotherapy programme team at the University of Liverpool uses a bespoke iPad App and web-portal to monitor and assess students on clinical placement Weekly, students are given scores and feedback relative to ten performance criteria. The data is collected through the iPad App and made available to staff and students through a secure web-portal. The use of this system since 2016 provides data on student cohorts and allows for longitudinal comparisons of their performance.

For the purpose of this study, data for the 2019 and 2020 graduating cohorts were compared.  The normal placement model consists of students completing three placements consisting of 12, 10 and 10 weeks. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 cohort had their third placement reduced to 5 weeks. (126 words)

Results: What were your main findings from your analysis?

Using a 10 point scoring system for each of the 10 criteria assessed each week, the mean scores achieved by the two cohorts at the end of week 1 of the third clinical placement were:

* 5.58 ± 0.17 (95% CI) (2019 cohort) and 5.88 ± 0.15 (95% CI) (2020 cohort)

While at the end of the third placement, 10 weeks for the 2019 cohort and 5 weeks for the 2020 cohort, the mean scores were:

* 9.19 ± 0.83 (95% CI) (2019 cohort) and 9.21 ± 0.10 (95% CI) (2020 cohort)

The data indicates that both cohorts where similar in the levels of performance shown at the start of the third clinical placement and that both cohorts improved their performance over the course of the placement. Furthermore, the data indicates that despite the 2020 cohort only spending 5 weeks on placement, compared to the 10 weeks of the 2019 cohort, there was no significant difference in the performance levels of the two cohorts at the end of the placement. (168 words)

Conclusion(s): Discuss your findings and what have you concluded from the study? What are your suggestions for future work?

Findings infer that the 2020 cohort achieved the same performance levels as the 2019 cohort at the end of their placement experience despite being 5 weeks shorter in duration. The 2020 cohort then completed additional placement hours to comply with the 1000 hours requirement.

Further comparisons are planned involving other cohorts and by breaking the data down into the individual performance criteria. (62 words)

Impact: What is the potential impact of the project?

If student performance has been unaffected by a shorter placement experience, then this brings into question the need for a mandated 1000 clinical hours. This study suggests that a reduction in mandated placement hours would not negatively impact on student performance, might increase placement availability and help maintain the ‘workforce pipeline’. (51 words)

How will the results be implemented into physiotherapy practice / management / education / research / policy?

The study might encourage debate about the mandated 1000 clinical hours needed to be completed by physiotherapy students on qualification. (20 words)

**References**

## HCPC (2020). ***The Standards of Proficiency for Physiotherapists*** 2013. Accessed 8th November 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/resources/standards/standards-of-proficiency-physiotherapists/>