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An exploration of assistant practitioner's (nursing) experiences of joining an undergraduate nursing degree programme: a qualitative descriptive study

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Background

Undergraduate nursing students enter university through a variety of pathways. For some, such as assistant practitioners who hold a two-year foundation degree (FD) in health (diploma level 5) this includes a truncated pathway enabling entry directly to points within year two of the three-year programme.

Aim

The aim of this study was to explore the experience of Assistant Practitioners in nursing who joined an undergraduate adult nursing programme as direct entrants to year two, following recognition (articulation) of prior learning.

Design

A qualitative descriptive methodology, using semi-structured individual face-to-face interviews was employed, congruent with exploration of participant subjective experiences. University ethics approval was in place (FREIC 12/2017).

Participants and settings

Five participants from across three adult nursing cohorts who entered year two between September 2017 and September 2018 were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Participants were recruited at two of the three campus sites; to reduce the potential for bias as the researcher held a lecturer position at the third campus site.

Method

Data were collected in five individual semi-structured interviews at campus site and time of participant choice. Interviews were transcribed verbatim; and analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2013) six stage framework.

Findings

Three main themes emerged: Learner preparedness; Challenges in transitioning; and Integration and support. The participants perceived challenges across academic, clinical and social integration domains; with perceptions of academic and clinical unpreparedness; as well as feelings of being 'different', and 'forgotten'; particularly in year of entry (year two). This was compounded by inconsistent awareness of this pathway across faculty and cohort peers, with some perceptions of animosity around funding and module exemptions.

The academic challenges related to differing pedagogies across previous education experiences and that of the university; despite having completed FD at equivalent academic level to programme year two. The value of bespoke induction was evident, and the support of direct entrant peers was critical for some.

The role transition from assistant practitioner to student nurse and the move towards registration posed identity challenges. A mature attitude and self-confidence were beneficial in meeting transition challenges as well as the criticality of mentor support, particularly in first placement.

Conclusion and implications

This study provides new insight to the experiences of Assistant Practitioners as direct entrants onto an undergraduate nursing programme, where simultaneous transitions are required across academic, social, and clinical domains. It is anticipated this study will help inform future direct entrants in nursing, faculty, partner organisations, policy; and generate research and practice development to support as seamless a transition as possible for direct entrants.

References

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2013) *Successful Qualitative Research: A practical guide for beginners*. Los Angeles: Sage.



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