

Mawson, Julie A. and Miller, Paul K. (2020) Stress and the mature undergraduate radiographer: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of final year clinical experiences. In: United Kingdom Imaging and Oncology Congress 2020: Pathways and Communication, 1-3 June 2020, ACC, Liverpool. (Unpublished)

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Stress and the mature undergraduate radiographer: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of final year clinical experiences

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Background: Alongside the now well-documented stresses of undertaking an undergraduate university degree (Regehr et al., 2013), contemporary healthcare students must also adapt to the pressures of a progressively greater clinical workload. To date, however, relatively little research has explored how the challenges and responsibilities of clinical placement specifically interact with the often-complex life circumstances of *mature* healthcare students, and none has addressed how the associated stresses affect the placement experiences of mature student radiographers.

Methods: With institutional ethical approval, extended semi-structured interviews were undertaken with N=6 (four female, two male) final year Diagnostic Radiography students aged 25 and over. At the time of interview, participants were placed in six different hospitals in the north west of England. Recorded data were transcribed verbatim, and investigated using the established techniques of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

Results: Analysis of data gave rise to N=3 pertinent superordinate themes; everyday sources and impacts of stress, stress manifestations in the clinical environment, and constructive management of stress. Participants variably asserted that their status as mature students could engender both greater and lesser stress than was apparent among their younger counterparts,

and sometimes both concurrently. All, however, reported that placement-related stress had at some point impacted upon their physical, psychological and social well-being, with most reporting that such stress had negatively affected perceived competence – and thus confidence - in the clinical environment.

Conclusion: It is contended that the nuanced, experiential findings can inform prospective discussions regarding curriculum development and placement management in diagnostic radiography.

References

Regehr C, Glancy D and Pitts A (2013) Interventions to reduce stress in university students: A review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders* 148(1): 1-11.

Smith JA, Flowers P and Larkin M (2009) *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. London: Sage.