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# Live virtual placements - a new approach to practice based learning



The role of the paramedic is diversifying and universities need to respond by developing curriculums that support paramedic graduates to meet future workforce needs. Placements are key to our students developing the necessary competencies to become qualified paramedics and the pressure is on universities to offer a wide range of placements to reflect professional diversification. In addition, HPCP's new standards of proficiency acknowledge that paramedics of the future are likely to consult patients in the virtual world.

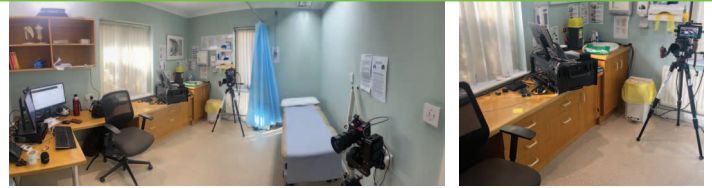
As universities strive to meet this demand, they are often faced with capacity issues. Rising student numbers, staff retention issues and competition for placements from other healthcare students can make it extremely challenging to secure placements, especially in desirable areas such as primary care.

One evening, I saw an article about a live stream of a surgical operation. This led me to wonder if live virtual placements for student paramedics might provide the answer to many of the issues surrounding placement availability.

There have only been a small number of qualitative studies on virtual placements, which suggested that if technology barriers are overcome and students are not socially isolated, then there are many benefits to using this model. Flexibility, diversity, increased placement capacity and opportunities for interprofessional learning are amongst the positives highlighted.

As a result of a bid, we successfully obtained £50K funding from Health Education England to pilot a series of virtual placements for paramedic students in primary care.

Digimed, a medical media company, provided the technological solution and a GP surgery based in the South of England, Modality in Mid Sussex, agreed to host the placements. The first pilot comprised 30 apprentices



from our North West Ambulance Service paramedic degree apprenticeship programme, who virtually observed a live clinic while sat in a classroom in the University of Cumbria's Lancaster campus. Digimed fitted the surgery with cameras and microphones and real patients consented to take part. Cameras were positioned so that students could clearly see the patients' concerns up close and hear how the GP dealt with each case.

The GP, Cathy O'Leary (Patch Associate Dean for GP East Surrey/Lead for GP Educator Pathway Kent, Surrey & Sussex) briefed the students before each consultation and afterwards, she interacted with students and staff via Microsoft Teams. In the afternoon, the apprentices consolidated their learning in seminars linked to the morning's experience.

Overall, student feedback was supportive.

The video stream of the placement was recorded for reuse in the programme's curriculum, and we hope that future live virtual placements will see other professions, such as physiotherapy and nursing take part. Eventually, we want to develop the model for other disciplines and placement settings.

**If you are interested to collaborate on future opportunities, please contact [Richard.Ward@Cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:Richard.Ward@Cumbria.ac.uk)**

**Richard Ward & Antony Freeman, Principal Lecturers, Centre of Excellence in Paramedic Practice, Institute of Health, University of Cumbria**

## Appeal for your case studies to support International Paramedics Day 2023

This year, the College of Paramedics and 55 partners from all over the world will be joining forces to showcase and promote International Paramedics Day on July 8 and our 2023 theme: **What Paramedics Do!**

This is your chance to come together and educate and inform the public, employers, prospective students, government leaders, political decision-makers and other healthcare workers about your role and the setting you work in. We want you to share the reasons why you love your job and what people would find most surprising about the work you do.

The case study forms are super-simple to complete and are available to download, fill in and submit via the website:

**[www.internationalparamedicsday.com/case-studies](http://www.internationalparamedicsday.com/case-studies)**

You can also send them to us in video format.

Your case studies will be published online and promoted widely via our social media channels on International Paramedics Day to give the world a much greater insight and understanding of **What Paramedics Do!**

Thank you to everyone who has already sent us their case studies and videos so far.

Chief Executive of the College of Paramedics, Tracy Nicholls OBE said: "Last year's International Paramedics Day was a real celebration of the profession coming together from all over the world to reveal why they were proud to be paramedics. But this year, the message is clear – being a paramedic is a versatile, multifaceted and diverse profession which has grown exponentially in the last decade. It's time people recognised, understood and appreciated that. Working in the ambulance service is, of course, a vital role which highly-skilled paramedics perform all around the world, and one that many people think of first, but this is by no means all that we do and paramedics are now managing a broad range of complex and challenging conditions in a wide range of in- and out-of-hospital environments."



To find out more about International Paramedics Day 2023 please visit [www.internationalparamedicsday.com](http://www.internationalparamedicsday.com)