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Session 83.1**An evaluation of collaborative research partnerships in occupational therapy education**

Wilby H, Ward K, Kempster C, Ripley W, Dunford C, Skerratt L, University of Cumbria, UK

A lack of skills and confidence in carrying out research has been identified amongst occupational therapists (Pighills et al, 2013). The consequent predominance of university-led research threatens to exacerbate the practice-research gap (Kielhofner, 2005). This poster describes the benefits and challenges of collaborative research partnerships (Crist, 2010) for occupational therapy students, practice partners and academic supervisors.

The aim of the project was to explore the benefits and challenges of the research partnerships from the perspectives of key stakeholders. Action research methodology was used. Five BSc, two MSc (pre-registration) students, six practice partners and four academic supervisors were recruited. Data was collected using questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews. All data were analysed thematically. Ethical and research governance approvals were gained from University of Cumbria and relevant NHS trusts respectively. The study was funded by the Higher Education Academy and the University of Cumbria.

Findings identified benefits for each stakeholder group. Students emphasised increased confidence and a sense of value and purpose in contributing to future service improvements. Practice partners valued the research findings to aid reflection on working practices and potential service development. Academic supervisors described satisfaction in building enhanced research capacity through practice-based projects. Communication challenges and increased stress and workload were reported; however, these did not outweigh the benefits. Importantly, the research collaborations were perceived to contribute to service enhancements and therefore yield benefits for service-users.

These findings illustrate the potential of collaborative research partnerships to build confidence and research capacity in future occupational therapists and thereby assist in reduction of the practice-research divide and support service development.

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Keywords

Education (CPD, LL, skills), Research, Partnerships, Practice development

Session 83.2**A university and practice reflection on “unified” working to support quality placements**

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In order to provide a quality placement experience the maintenance of effective communication between practice and University is essential. Dunn and Hansford (1997) discussed the importance of good collaboration in order to create a positive student learning environment. This has more recently been highlighted by Kirke et al (2007) as needing further development to establish even closer links.

At Bournemouth University (BU) approximately one third of occupational therapy (OT) student time during the degree course is spent in practice as part of the pre-registration requirement. Dorset Healthcare University NHS Foundation Trust is one of the largest providers of BU OT student placements. Therefore, it could be said that practice partners and university staff are all part of one, large, teaching team. It was felt beneficial for both agencies to reflect on placement organisation in order to strengthen the already solid foundations. Through this process a number of factors became apparent.

Two of the key components that were particularly highlighted were the need to establish solid links and develop a range of communication methods. Changes within the NHS provide new and interesting challenges for maintaining and advancing these in order to continue providing the essential mix of quality placement experience for students. “Contacts with clinicians and clinical agencies need to be cultivated and maintained through networking. Coordination is an on-going consideration to meet the challenges of change” (Redding and Graham 2006 p.177).

This piece of work highlights good practice as well as areas for future development within BU and Dorset Healthcare placement system. It also considers the potential benefits of strong partnership working for students, education providers and future workforce development within the Trust.

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