

Online course got newly qualified nurses, midwives and AHPs off to a flying start

November 17 2011

Newly qualified nurses, midwives and allied health professionals who took part in an online course during their first year of employment reported increased clinical skills development and confidence. However the survey on the Flying Start NHS™ programme, published in the December issue of the *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, found that mentors needed more training and time to provide support.

Researchers surveyed 547 newly qualified practitioners who had undertaken the course, developed by NHS Education Scotland, and interviewed 21 project lead/co-ordinators and 22 mentors.

"The majority of the newly qualified practitioners reported that Flying Start NHS™ had been useful in terms of clinical skills development and [confidence](#)" says lead author Professor Pauline Banks, University of West Scotland.

"Those who were able to take protected time were more likely to complete the learning units and report that the support they received was good. Both newly qualified practitioners and mentors reported a lack of time. Newly qualified practitioners who took up posts in the community expressed greater satisfaction with the support received."

The respondents were [nurses](#) (61%), allied health professionals (35%) and [midwives](#) (4%). The top five occupations were: adult nursing (43%), mental health nursing (13%), speech and language therapy (9%), occupational therapy (8%) and physiotherapy (8%). Just under half

(47%) worked in acute settings, 18% worked in the community and the remainder worked in both.

Key findings of the study included:

- When it came to clinical skills development, 75% of respondents found the clinical skills module the most useful, followed by safe practice (69%), reflective practice (69%) communication (67%) and professional development (62%).
- The five most useful modules for developing confidence were: safe practice (62%), clinical skills (62%), reflective practice (61%), professional development (57%) and communication (56%).
- The careers pathway was the least useful module, scoring 43% for clinical skills development and 34% for confidence. Just 12% said it had helped them understand their future career options, 32% said it had not and the rest were undecided.
- When it came to development needs, staff were very clear about their most and least important priorities, with 71% putting learning the job first and 75% putting commitment to the organisation and career progression in the bottom slot. The votes for the second and third priorities - becoming a member of the team and orientation/induction to the clinical area - were much more evenly balanced.
- Three-quarters of the respondents were allocated a mentor in the first six weeks of employment, with nine out of ten having one by three months. They spent an average of just over two hours a month with their mentor.
- More than half (57%) had protected time for the course, with an average of 3.4 hours per month. However four out of five were not

always able to take it. Time was also an issue for some mentors, as was lack of training in the programme.

- Eight out of ten respondents (79%) who had been in post for 12-18 months had completed less than half of the learning units, when ideally they should have completed the programme.
- Community-based staff expressed greater satisfaction with the course than acute-based staff. Staff in rotational or non-permanent posts faced greater challenges, including not knowing if they would keep the same mentor.

"The findings of our study highlight the challenges that newly qualified respondents face during the transition from student to qualified practitioner and indicate that the majority found completing the online learning units useful in terms of clinical skills development and confidence" says Professor Banks.

"However, many respondents reported that they found completing the course difficult, with some believing that there was a lack of partnership or an imbalance in the expectations placed on them as newly qualified practitioners and the support provided by the NHS. This included time issues for both students and mentors.

"It is clear that newly-qualified practitioners undertaking Flying Start NHS™ in their first year found it increased their clinical skills development and confidence. Investing the time needed to make this course even more effective is likely to pay dividends for the NHS, patients and carers, as well as for the practitioners themselves."

More information: Flying Start NHS™: easing the transition from student to registered health professional. Banks et al. Journal of Clinical Nursing. 20, pp3567. (December 2011). [doi:](#)

[10.1111/j.1365-2702.2011.03796.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2702.2011.03796.x)

Provided by Wiley

Citation: Online course got newly qualified nurses, midwives and AHPs off to a flying start (2011, November 17) retrieved 18 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-11-online-newly-nurses-midwives-ahps.html>

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