

Untangle those Stethoscopes; Never too early to start reflecting!

Qualitative review of a Reflective Practice group for Clinical Undergraduate Medical Students

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Background

- Equipping our medical students with as many tools as possible to cope with the challenges that they will inevitably face has never been more important than it is today.
- The aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of a reflective practice (RP) group for medical students, particularly with adaptation to COVID-19 and transition to video

Methods

- A pilot programme of RP for 3rd year medical students commencing their clinical placement was run by the Sligo Medical Academy, NUIG in Ireland between January - April 2020.
- This group for nine students was initially run face-to-face but pivoted to an online group in March 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Data was collected through one-to-one interviews with all student participants and the facilitator (n=10). Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data were analysed using thematic content analysis.

Thematic Analysis

Support System

- The group developing as a strong support system was the main emergent theme from our analysis.
- Students particularly noted a sense of solidarity and friendship.

“Because it feels overwhelming, but then once you speak up you realise everyone in the group is exactly the same. And it doesn't make you feel inferior because of you kind of just realise nobody's there yet. The group was a space you could share that”

Professional Identity

- The reflective practice group became a space where the students freely discussed their choice of career.
- The students discussed morality in medicine, and how this impacted on their concept of a ‘doctor’.

“There were a lot of people who held similar points of view as to which doctors we looked up to, and aspired to be, and why. And there were also some doctors who kind of shocked us by some of their practice, and we would talk about that a lot”

Did they find this group helpful?

- Overwhelmingly yes, all students questioned found this reflective practice process both helpful and meaningful.

“You just feel so much lighter afterwards because everyone just get's things off their chest”

Transition to Video-link platform

- All the students who transitioned to the group over zoom commented on how they were glad to have the continued support throughout the pandemic, and how they would recommend a group via zoom going forward.
- Most (6/9) students referenced how video-calling is much more common and acceptable, however many (7/9) also referenced how they greatly valued the face-to-face interaction
- The group facilitator commented how, often, it is the groups that have established in person that are the trickiest to transition to a video-link format. Whereas when a group forms initially in a video setting the group can work quite well.

“It was great that we could continue, I know every time that we logged in everyone was quite excited to see each other again”

“Yeah, I found it good, I mean it wasn't that different in fairness, you know, because we were kind of doing the same thing and checking in with everyone”

Transition to Clinical Environment

- The students highlighted how they thought this time of transition, from pre-clinical to the clinical environment, was an apt time for engaging in reflective practice.
- This sentiment was echoed in the interview with the group facilitator.

“Through that critical time, where we're not used to being in the hospital, and there are so many unknowns. You feel so at the bottom of everyone. You feel like you don't belong in the hospital. So just having that little bit of a time to reflect and talk about it. It was helpful.”

Impact of Gender

- This voluntary reflective practice group was, interestingly, made up of only female medical students.
- The members of the group often discussed gender differences in the workplace.

“There were a lot of issues that we touched on that were important, and I would say more so important to women ... than they would have been for men. So, like, sexism in the practice was something that we experienced on the placement, and it was something that we talked about a lot because it is very mutual to us.”

Question-specific Themes

Challenges of the group

- Students commented on their energy levels, which ranged from ‘tired’ to ‘exhausted’. The group took place in the evening following a long and busy day on clinical placement.
- The group facilitator commented that this group should be within regular hours
- This was echoed in student's interviews; with one asking could this reflective practice group form a part of their mandatory module on ‘Professionalism’.

“Ideally, I would feel it should be done within the curriculum time.... it's an integral part as opposed to an optional add-on... so that would be something I would feel quite strong on.”

Conclusions

- Reflective practice programmes are not routinely offered to medical students in Ireland currently and this study gives recommendations on implementing and improving experiences of undergraduate training based on RP.

- This study was awarded a Research Seed Grant award from the Sligo University Hospital Research and Ethics Committee 2020 to the value of 1000 euro
- This Study received ethical approval from the Sligo Research and Ethics committee on 18/06/2020