Students in General Practice & Work Experience

Given the current recruitment and retention crisis in primary care, anything we can do to encourage interest and generate enthusiasm for primary care is to be strongly supported, so if your practice feels it can host work experience students, we would support this.

Furthermore, we understand that it is becoming increasingly difficult for potential medical school, and possibly other healthcare applicants to secure experience in secondary care, (due to health & safety, infection control and other restrictions), yet often evidence of experience is mandatory on course application forms. Usually the student is seriously considering a career in healthcare, and therefore patients and your staff will be generally supportive.

You may consider the following points before agreeing to accept a student in general practice:

1. Most importantly, ensure the student understands CONFIDENTIALITY issues, and signs an agreement before they start. Please see example one and example two which you can copy.

2. We would advise that as far as possible the visiting student should not live in nor attend school in the practice area.

3. Before a student arrives for the placement, check if they have key aims or requirements. What are they hoping to gain from the experience?

4. Setting up a timetable such as this example can be helpful. It clarifies who is responsible for supervision and shares the workload for the practice. It ensures that access to clinical data, prescriptions and patients is monitored.

5. Setting some boundaries can be helpful. Tell them what time to arrive; where they can leave their belongings; where they should go if the patient does’ want them in the room and remind them to go back again as a busy Nurse or GP may forget to call them in again after that patient has left. If you are considering allowing the student to sit in on clinical encounters (e.g... surgery, home visit, baby clinic) then it is important that each patient is advised that this student is unqualified and observing and consent for the student to be present be explicitly sought. This consent should be given freely and without pressure. Patients are fully entitled to ask for the student to leave at any time without any detriment to their care.

6. Many practices have a card which is given to the patient when booking in seeking their consent to a student being present (This can be used for Undergraduate Medical and Nursing Students as well). The patient returns the card to reception if they consent but are advised to bring the card into the consultation IF they would like the student to be absent. It is a coloured card and easy to spot. The doctor sees the card and (without embarrassment) recognises that the student should leave for the consultation. This seems to work well.

7. Identify a project or goal for the student. This may be a task which helps you, (e.g. can they telephone some patients to check smoking status to help your QOF work? Can they assist...
your Nurses with ordering stores? Can they scan in some letters ready for read coding? Can they do some filing?) You could challenge them to choose a common condition which they observe and then go and look it up and present some interesting aspect about it as a mini presentation at the end of the attachment to some practice staff. Students generally thrive on being given a challenge & responsibility, and will have a more positive experience with you which they will be happy to advertise!

Remember, a well planned work experience placement can be mutually beneficial!

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