Description

Embedding the PMA and A_EQUIP in Midwifery Education: Part 2

Lisa Lachanudis (She/her) – Lecturer in Midwifery, University of Hull

Social @LachanudisLisa

Fran Leavy (She/her) – Lecturer in Midwifery, University of Hull

Social @FranELeavy

Summary

The second part of this blog (see Part 1 here) explores key themes of connecting with peers, connecting with lecturers, exam stress and self-care, that emerged from a wellbeing day for midwifery students. Feedback highlighted the importance of peer interactions in reducing attrition and improving student wellbeing. Students valued opportunities to socialise across cohorts, fostering community and support. Engaging with lecturers in a relaxed setting was seen as beneficial, highlighting the need for more approachable, mentor-like relationships. The timing of the wellbeing day after exams was appreciated for alleviating stress. Feedback from students and staff suggests incorporating regular wellbeing activities into midwifery education could enhance overall student experience.



Fran Leavy



Lisa Lachanudis

Introduction

Following on from part one in which several themes were identified in the feedback gathered from our wellbeing day, this article will explore the identified themes in turn and consider their significance to our approach in midwifery education.

The themes were: connecting with peers; connecting with lecturers; exam stress and self-care.

Connecting with peers

Attrition rates and poor mental health are high in midwifery education[1] and there is an urgent need to improve student midwives' wellbeing. Peer support is shown to be valued by students, reducing attrition, fostering a sense of community and improving skill development and access to information.[2] However, our midwifery programme is structured in a way that means year groups are taught separately with very limited opportunities to interact with other cohorts. The wellbeing day seeks to facilitate informal interactions between students at all stages of the programme.

It is clear from feedback that students valued the opportunity to socialise with other cohorts, as illustrated by the quotes below:

"a nice opportunity to mingle with our cohort"

"a really nice opportunity to … speak with our peers"

"The day is really useful to get students from all years together"

Some of the activities, such as yoga, required students to sign up in advance due to limited space. Several students signed up in established friendship groups, while others attended alone, but all were noted to be chatting regardless of year group. As the activities were not midwifery related or required any prior knowledge there was no competitiveness or hierarchy. Activities such as colouring in, coffee and cake and hand massage were observed to be particularly sociable, providing an activity that required them to sit in an allocated space for a given period. During this time conversation was helped by prompts from lecturers to initiate conversation, but quickly became natural and student led. It was noted that the topics were social to start with, but more junior students moved on to midwifery, seeking support and clarification from final year students. The senior students appeared responsive to this, validating anxieties and offering reassurance.

Connecting with lecturers

We were particularly struck by the language students used in their feedback about their interactions with midwifery lecturers. On more than one occasion they referenced seeing lecturers as human beings, leading us to question how the team are usually perceived. As a team of PMAs we are focused on developing collegiate relationships and this feedback has led us to consider whether the hierarchical nature of the student-lecturer relationship continues to be a barrier tothis. While it is important to maintain professional relationships, their comments imply that the students value apersonalised approach:

"It was nice to be with you as people not lecturers"

"It was very relaxed and lovely to talk casually with the lecturers"

"opportunity to…see our lecturers as human"

Feedback in Higher Education tends to focus on the content of the programme rather than on perceptions of academic staff, and personalised feedback about lecturers is discouraged due to the potential for it to become a popularity contest.[3]

A cordial student – lecturer relationship improves academic achievement and attendance at lectures and consideration should be given to other factors such as the relaxed environment and ethos of the day.[4] The wellbeing sessions were provided within a relaxed space, with comfy sofa seating and soft furnishing. Meeting with students in a 'neutral' place provides students and lecturers with a more even level.

It is important to us as PMAs to be approachable, and forms part of our professional identities as lecturers who are more of a supportive mentor than a traditional expert. To be constructive, the student-lecturer relationship should be collaborative, and comparable to the professional-patient partnership we are used to in clinical practice. However, as a lecturer, it is important to maintain professional boundaries (as per The NMC Code) to preserve academic objectivity.

There is a dearth of research exploring the midwifery lecturer-student relationship, the impact this may have on students' academic success and, considering the potential parallels with the midwife-mother relationship,[5] their capacity to provide effective clinical care.

Exam stress and self-care

Assessment is an inevitable source of stress in any academic programme. The wellbeing days were timed to occur at the end of an assessment week, prior to students returning to placement or new theory modules. The feedback such as those below illustrate that the timing of the day was appreciated.

"This afternoon was well and truly needed after the exams"

"We had a really nice opportunity to relax after exams"

"Perfect day and opportunity to chill and reconnect after exams!"

We plan to continue to offer wellbeing days after the assessment weeks however it is hoped that the days will raise the profile of PMAs and encourage students to seek support throughout the programme. We acknowledge that interactions such as the wellbeing days do not resolve the underlying issues causing stress and anxiety for many student midwives: cultural challenges within clinical practice and exposure to traumatic events, navigating conflict, financial strain, work-life balance, being away from friends and family, and academic pressure. As a result, these sessions could be viewed as tokenistic, but the overall aim is to raise the profile and increase engagement with PMAs, so that on transition to qualified midwife, they continue to access this support.

Midwifery lecturer team feedback

Some of the lecturers facilitating the day were not PMAs and there was some questioning of the use of several staff for a full day, and whether this was efficient use of their time. However, despite these reservations, staff participated and offered positive feedback, and it has prompted some to express more interest in the PMA role. The day offered a rare

opportunity for staff to engage with each other in a less formal and more sociable way within working hours, enhancing team dynamics.

Whilst not formally collected, staff feedback was on a similar vein to that of students, as reported enjoying interacting with students in a relaxed atmosphere, and even while facilitating sessions, they were able to enjoy the benefits of them.

The day was an opportunity to get to know students from all cohorts that we may not have had much contact with. These benefits to staff had not been anticipated and were an unexpected bonus.

Conclusion

Feedback from students was wholly positive with benefits of connecting with peers, lecturers and mitigating exam stress. This feedback reinforces the benefits of fostering good relationships with students that extend beyond the classroom and demonstrates the rationale for integrating PMA activities into the academic programme.

In addition, the midwifery lecturer team gave similar feedback. It could be argued that lecturers would benefit from similar regular, informal activities. Including non-PMAs in the wellbeing day provided an opportunity for PMAs to remove the mystique surrounding PMA activity.

References

1. Hunter, B., Fenwick, J., Sidebotham, M., & Henley, J. (2019). Midwives in the United Kingdom: Levels of burnout, depression, anxiety and stress and associated predictors. *Midwifery, 79,* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.midw.2019.08.008
2. Collings, R., Swanson, V., & Watkins, R. (2014). The impact of peer mentoring on levels of student wellbeing, integration and retention: A controlled comparative evaluation of residential students in UK higher education. *Higher Education, 68*(6), 927–942. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-014-9752-y
3. Sakr, M. (2022). Embedding student feedback in deep pedagogic reflection: The potentials of drawing and Deleuzian analysis. *Teaching in Higher Education, 27*(3), 281-296. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2020.1796610
4. Chinaza, U. (2020). Exploring effects of lecturers–students' relationship on students academic performances in selected rural universities. *Interchange, 51*(4), 345-360. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10780-020-09397-1
5. Kirkham, M. (2010). *The Midwife-Mother Relationship* (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury.

Part 1 of this blog is here

Category

1. All4Maternity Blog

Tags

1. a-equip
2. education
3. PMA
4. student wellbeing

Date Created
29th August 2024