Practice Learning Support Protocol
Introduction

This protocol is intended to be used by those involved in student support during practice learning experiences. In particular, it provides a transparent and consistent way of providing support and escalating concerns. Literature used to support the development of this protocol include, NMC (2008a) Standards to support learning and assessment in practice; NMC (2008b) Code of Conduct; Standards of conduct, performance and ethics for nurses and midwives; NES (2008) Quality Standards for Practice Placements (QSPP); NMC (2009) Guidance on professional conduct for nursing and midwifery students; NMC (2010a) Guidance for raising and escalating concerns; NMC (2010b) Advice and supporting information for implementing NMC Standards for pre-registration nursing education and NMC (2010c) Standards for pre-registration Nursing Education.

For the purposes of this protocol, the term ‘Academic Advisor (AA)’ (GCU Academic Support Policy 2010; 2.1) has been used to denote those academic staff with responsibility for student learning in practice learning experiences (PLE) and encompasses the terms Personal Academic Advisor (PAA), Professional Development Portfolio (PDP) Supervisor, Module Leader, Academic Co-ordinators, Link lecturer; this list is not exhaustive. In relation to managers in practice learning environments, the term ‘Senior Nurse’ has been used to denote those with line management responsibility for mentors and encompasses the terms Senior Charge Nurses, Team Leaders, Assistant Senior Nurses, Lead Nurses, Care Home Managers; again, this list is not exhaustive.

Practice learning experiences for pre-registration nursing students continue to be a core component of nurse education programmes accounting for 50% of the programme content. The responsibility for the learning and assessment of students in practice learning environments rests with the mentor who is accountable to the NMC for decisions made (NMC 2008a; NMC 2008b; NMC 2010b). Students are required to be supervised at all times when giving direct care in practice however this supervision may be direct or indirect with mentors using their professional judgement to decide where duties may be delegated and the level of supervision required (NMC 2010c). In order to facilitate the mentor in making these decisions, the Glasgow Caledonian University School of Health, the University of Glasgow School of Nursing & Health Care and NHS Education for Scotland (NES) recommend that mentors supervise the student for a minimum of 50% of the time in their practice learning experiences.

In practice learning environments, mentors are supported in their role by colleagues, managers, Practice Education Facilitators (PEF) and Care Home Education Facilitators (CHEF). However, mentors may find themselves in a situation where there are concerns about a student’s competence or fitness to progress. Consequently, mentors may need support when making difficult assessment decisions and may feel anxious about being accountable for such decisions. The NMC Code (2008b) reminds mentors of their professional accountability and responsibilities and where a student is recognised as being “weak and not achieving”, it is essential that they “are identified early and given the right amount of encouragement and support and concerns dealt with in a timely manner” (NMC 2010b, p. 23). Where students have a concern about their PLE, they should be encouraged to raise this in a supportive manner.

This protocol offers mentors and students a clear and robust system for escalating concerns and is separated into two flowcharts, one relating to mentor concerns and one relating to student concerns.

This protocol has been developed in partnership between Glasgow Caledonian University School of Health and Life Sciences, the University of Glasgow School of Nursing & Health Care, and the provider organisations.
Mentor has a concern relating to student performance

Gather information from co-mentors/team. Discuss with Senior Nurse. Discuss with student.

If yes: no further action

If no: Inform Senior Nurse, AA & student. If support needed, contact PEF/CHEF.

Arrange tripartite meeting between mentor, student & AA.

Discuss concerns & agree action plan and evaluation criteria

Document all discussions clearly in the PLAD.

Inform the student and AA of outcome.

The mentor should contact the PEF/CHEF if they require additional support.

Concern resolved?

Continue monitoring student performance against criteria set out in action plan.

At student's final assessment, document clearly the outcome in the PLAD and sign.
Student has a concern relating to their practice learning experience

A tripartite meeting between mentor, student & AA will be arranged

Document the outcomes of the tripartite meeting & ensure the student, mentor and AA are provided with a copy of the meeting outcomes & action plan

If no...

If yes: no further action

If the student requires further support then they can speak to a mentor, AA or senior nurse

Student continues with practice learning experience. Student performance continues to be assessed in line with the criteria set out in PLAD/action plan

Concern resolved?

Yes: no further action

If no...

Speak to mentor or co-mentor to discuss concerns
If unable to speak to mentor or co-mentor then discuss with Senior Nurse or AA

Concern resolved?
Glossary of terms

AA: Academic Advisor- the member of staff who is the named contact from the university for your student

Action plan- the written record which identifies your concern(s), agreed goals and evaluation criteria

PLAD: Practice Learning Assessment Document- the document used for the written record of your assessment of the student

CHEF: Care Home education Facilitator- the education facilitator for mentor support and education for your Care Home

PEF: Practice Education Facilitator- the education facilitator for mentor support in your institution, for example, acute or community experiences

Practice learning experience- the term used for the student’s clinical placement

Practice learning environment- the clinical environment where the student has their practice learning experience

Tripartite Meeting: A meeting between 3 people, usually the student, mentor and academic advisor

References


Nursing and Midwifery Council. 2010c, Standards for pre-registration Nursing Education. NMC, London.