

Finding Common Ground: Insights into the perspectives and expectations of teaching and learning within a paediatric clinical environment.

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Objectives

This study explores experiences, perceptions and expectations of paediatricians and medical students when teaching and learning within a paediatric clinical environment.

Methods

- A qualitative study was undertaken using 26 semi-structured interviews with clinicians (n=7) and 4th year medical students (n=19) during their placements in a Level 2 paediatric unit.
- Data was collected between September 2021 to September 2022.
- Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, with full consent of participants.
- Qualitative data derived from interviews was thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's framework¹.
- Data saturation was reached.
- Thematic analysis was conducted by 2 researchers independently.
- Themes were then refined through an iterative process of discussion between the researchers.

Key Themes Identified

Valued aspects of teaching and learning within the clinical environment:

- Value of participation in clinical work
- Developing readiness for postgraduate training
- Levels of engagement in teaching and learning
- Understanding perspectives is important

Theme 1. Value of Participation in Clinical work

"Being involved in ward rounds makes it more useful for medical students so whether that be writing in the notes or being asked to take the history or perform the examination so then you're *engaged with the learning experience* rather than just standing there and witnessing what's going on".
Clinical Staff

"good because often you feel like a spare part, but in this case you felt as though you were doing something useful....."
Medical student

"if you are involved in ward round it's much more enjoyable"
Medical student

"So having a role would be a bit of an incentive to focus a bit more and want to be where I am wanted".
Medical student

"so that they are doing the note prepping so they feel part of the team, because ultimately that's much more enjoyable I would have thought anyway as a student, rather than standing and watching you want to be feeling like you're useful and practical".
Clinical Staff

Theme 2. Developing readiness for Postgraduate Training

"I enjoy trying to get beyond the textbook and trying to get them to think clinically. So, trying to get them to think about what they would be doing as an F1/F2 and trying to get them to apply knowledge".
Clinical Staff

"I think what's also good is that I can watch the doctors write what they think is important and they will go through every now and then "this is how I do it, this is the stuff that I think is important to write down". Seeing as I am going to be an F1 doctor soon and you spend a lot of that doing the notes, I think its important for me to know what important stuff I need to write down and what I don't need to write down".
Medical student

"Exposure to the ward round in general, talking it through with the doctors, watching how they document it, that kind of stuff is always useful".
Medical student

".....it's about the basics I suppose, how to document correctly, how to prepare notes, that side of things, because I think that's a generic skill that can apply to anywhere".
Clinical Staff

Theme 3. Levels of Engagement in Teaching and Learning

"It's a real pleasure to teach people if they're obviously engaged and want to learn"
Clinical staff

".....how engaged they were or willing to be with you because if you have their support, it's a lot easier to get some learning done"
Medical student

"...laying a foundation when you get to the ward. If I had spent a really productive day/morning/afternoon with someone who has been lovely or really helped me or shown me where I can get things, I think that makes me more confident going to the ward on my own."
Medical student

"....it's quite nice when someone comes and they say hi, I'm the student I'd love to get involved, what have you got that I can get involved with versus sometimes when the students come and they stand in the corner and you have to go and find them and then find out what they want".
Clinical staff

"Whereas I don't just want to follow someone round especially if they don't really want to teach so I don't go in because of that"
Medical Student

Theme 4. Understanding Perspectives is Important

"sometimes you can feel a little bit lost when it's just yourself and it's self-directed"
Medical student

"I think it can be a bit anxiety inducing having to go at the start because you don't really know what you're doing and it's quite terrifying see kids, but I expected that anyway".
Medical student

"You're pressured by the job that you are trying to do and you're pressured by the patients that you've got to see. I think you end up feeling a little bit, it's not that it's a chore, but I end up feeling guilty because I don't feel that I necessarily always give them the experience that I want them to have, but equally you have to be a little bit realistic and actually patient care does have to come first and is the priority during that situation".
Clinical Staff

".....when the parents are there, your learning may not be their priority, which is understandable".
Medical student

"it's your first time doing it, you're not as comfortable as you would be as it's an unfamiliar environment so you're not as confident to go off by yourself so you definitely need someone to kind of hold your hand for the first couple of times".
Medical student

Results

- All participants enjoyed teaching and learning within the clinical environment.
- Clinicians and students mostly agreed in topics needed to be covered, including common paediatric conditions and generic skills required for postgraduate training.
- Clinicians emphasised holistic thinking and clinical reasoning as key skills.
- Clinicians valued development of an adult-learning approach. Students' expectations aligned towards support and guidance within the clinical environment.
- Students perceived some clinicians lacked appreciation for the anxieties Paediatrics as a speciality and a new clinical environment may elicit.
- Students and clinicians identified similar challenges when learning in the clinical environment: workload, staff availability for teaching support and learning resources, and identifying patients appropriate for review.

All these factors contributed to the degree of participation and engagement.

Conclusion

- This study identifies similarities and differences in perspectives and expectations within the educational partnership between paediatricians and medical students. Engagement is hindered when expectations and perceptions misalign.
- There is an expectation of medical students to transition towards educational independence during medical training. Progress of this transition is shaped by the character of the clinical and educational community in which the learner is placed.

Future Recommendations

- Training for clinical staff on curriculum requirements and learning methods.
- An educational mentor scheme for students.
- Structured, self-directed learning resources available to complement clinical teaching.

References

Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology, Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3:2, 77-101

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