

## **Enhanced service and education partnerships deliver and assess the district nursing programme at Manchester Metropolitan University**

The contribution of clinical expertise from mentors and managers associated with Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), whether for teaching, curriculum development, approval or review, is always readily forthcoming. The 2007 review of District Nursing, included visits to Manchester, Stockport, and Tameside and Glossop PCTs. The quality of student support and the robust working relationship that exists between the university and the service area was commended. Such a relationship is essential to ensure that students are academically and clinically prepared to meet existing and future challenges in the workplace.

Mentors have a pivotal role to play in helping students to apply their knowledge to the benefit of patients and services. To do this, they need to possess a thorough understanding of the course and how their specific contribution fits into the curriculum as a whole. At MMU, this is facilitated by the annual provision of a number of briefing days and a mentor marking support group. Whilst primarily designed to ensure that mentors have sufficient information and support to carry out their role, these sessions provide valuable opportunities for identifying practice issues of particular relevance to the content and delivery of the district nursing curriculum. Other means of strengthening links between the university and the clinical area include 'Disseminating good practice' days (where mentors and managers are invited to give presentations to their peers on innovative service developments in their area), and invitations to mentors to join students in the classroom for practice portfolio compilation workshops.

Mentors also contribute to curriculum delivery by providing classroom sessions on topics of particular clinical interest to district nurses. For example, this year one mentor has given a presentation on her work in falls prevention in residential homes (which received a Nursing Times Public Health Award) and another has provided a session on how she introduced the use of Entonox to relieve pain caused by dressing changes. These sessions clearly demonstrate the leadership role of the district nurse and students find them highly motivating.

It is equally important for the District Nursing Award Leader to visit the practice areas. This may be to conduct 'routine' placement visits or to provide additional support to individual mentors. Involvement in service activities by, for example, participating in meetings, spending time with mentors to observe new ways of working or responding to requests from managers to provide practice-based sessions on a particular topic of relevance to the district nursing workforce is particularly gratifying.

The above examples illustrate just a few of the ways in which MMU and clinical staff work in partnership: some activities are mandatory, others voluntary. Both University and clinical staff have heavy work commitments and maintaining strong links can be challenging. However, the benefits of close working relationships include increased sensitivity to the needs of both parties and, ultimately, a richer student experience.

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