

Internship case study

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Background

I have been an acute oncology adult nurse at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust (NUH) for a year and a half after qualifying two years ago. When starting at NUH I quickly sought senior support for career advice with little idea of where I wanted to go in my career. This is when the idea of a Clinical Academic Career was introduced to me, alongside the Clinical Scholar Bronze Award*. I am passionate about improving the care we deliver to patients, and working concurrently in research and clinical practice appeared to be the best way to contribute towards evidenced based practice, whilst keeping in close contact with patients. Therefore, after gaining a year's clinical experience, the opportunity to undertake this internship was something I was not going to miss out on.

About the project

Working in oncology and caring for patients at the end of life on a regular basis I consider to be a real privilege. Having read about the serious downfalls at Mid Staffs (Francis Report) and the need to improve the care we deliver to patients at the end of life, fuelled my enthusiasm to undertake a piece of research aimed at understanding what compassion in end of life nursing care is. After much discussion and crucial guidance from my mentor we decided I would undertake a qualitative descriptive study exploring compassionate end of life nursing care from the perspectives of bereaved families and carers. I conducted four semi-structured interviews with participants who had been recruited via local churches, transcribed these, and then thematically analysed the data using an exploratory approach. The ultimate aim of my research was to explore what compassionate end of life nursing care is from the views and experiences of bereaved families and carers in order to improve end of life care for the future.

Guidance from my mentor

My mentor throughout the internship, Professor Bridget Johnston (Professor of Palliative and Supportive Care), had been my mentor for over a year whilst I had been at NUH. It was Bridget's support and guidance that lead me to applying for this internship. Over the 6 months Bridget and I met on a regular basis and she was always available if I required help at any stage of my research. She aided me in refining my research idea to ensure it was achievable in the given timeframe. It was a fantastic opportunity to work with Bridget and her support was invaluable.

* The Clinical Scholar Bronze Award is the local internship scheme within the ICA Programme in the East Midlands

Development

There is no doubt that my research skills and developed since completing the internship. Ultimately I now feel better equipped to design and conduct research that is clinically focused, with the aim to inform and improve the quality of patient care. Having used bereaved participants in my research, I have gained a greater awareness of the difficulties in recruiting vulnerable adults and the sensitivities required when communicating with this sample group. Having had the opportunity to test my interview knowledge I have learnt that this is a refined skill that I need to expand.

This experience allowed me to foster skills in identifying research needs, evolving a research proposal, developing a robust ethics application, independently interviewing participants, and reporting on findings in a concise manner. Throughout the educational days I was able to develop my presentation skills, knowledge on quantitative and qualitative research and academic writing skills. I particularly found the Action Learning Sets usual for discussing any issues and new ideas with fellow care makers.

Outputs

After working hard for five months on developing a robust research proposal, going through university ethics procedures and completing data collection and analysis, I spent the final month writing up my findings in a 7000 word dissertation. Initially I was worried about writing this and felt nervous about fulfilling the required 7000 words. However, once I started my confidence grew and I was able to put everything I had learnt into practice and offer a dissertation that I was very proud of. I also completed the 3000 word reflective account at the end of the internship.

As part of the internship I had to present my research at the Midlands Clinical Academic Research Showcase. I presented an overview of my research, sharing the highlights and challenges I faced throughout the clinical scholar programme. I was also chosen to present my research again to a larger audience consisting of Lord Willis and Professor Lisa Bayliss-Pratt. Despite this being the most nerve-racking part of the internship it was also the most rewarding. I went on to present my research at the Annual Research and Education Conference and won best presentation.

I am currently working with my mentor to write up my research findings in preparation for publication, aiming to publish within the International Journal of Palliative Nursing. Despite this being a very small piece of research I feel other nurses can learn from my findings to overall benefit end of life care.

Benefits

After completion of the internship I felt in a much better position to apply for the Masters in Research Methods and continue my journey along the HEE/NIHR Integrated Clinical Academic Programme. After applying to the University of Nottingham and the University of Sheffield I was offered a place at both universities to study the Masters. I accepted a place at Nottingham and am excited to start in September 2015.

This experience confirmed my passion for developing as a Clinical Academic and I am now more than ever motivated to undertake high quality research to improve patient care and experience. My long term aspiration is to become a clinical academic who leads in research, education and practice and who is able to further invigorate nursing professionals to undertake clinically relevant enquiry to a high calibre and can be used to inform care at an international level.