Physiotherapy Students’ experiences of poor quality care on Clinical Placement: 
Implications of the Francis Report

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Abstract

Objectives (1) To ascertain the incidence of poor quality care witnessed by physiotherapy students while on clinical placement. (2) To identify potential barriers to physiotherapy students reporting these incidents. (3) To help inform university staff and clinical educators on how best to support students facing these issues.

Design Mixed methodology; a qualitative study with four semi-structured focus groups and a quantitative study with an online questionnaire composed of five categorical questions.

Setting A university in London.

Participants Inclusion criteria was physiotherapy students who had completed at least one clinical placement. Twenty-two participants contributed to the focus group sessions and thirty-three completed the online questionnaire.

Main outcome measures Number of students observing and/or reporting poor quality of care on placement. Thematic analysis of semi-structured focus groups.

Results 42% of respondents to the online questionnaire reported witnessing poor quality of care on placement. Six main themes were identified from the qualitative study: (1) Awareness of Francis report; (2) Experiences of poor care; (3) Differentiating good from bad care; (4) Decision to report; (5) Awareness of reporting pathway; and (6) Proposals for changes to reporting.

Conclusions Physiotherapy students in this cohort frequently encounter quality of care concerns on placement and feel unprepared to deal with these. University-based education and clinical placement inductions should specifically address incident reporting with reference to the findings of the Francis report.

Keywords: Whistleblowing, Critical incidents, Professionalism
OUR RESEARCH

Context
3rd Year Undergraduate Physiotherapy research project
May 2013 – May 2014
Team based project
Supervised by contact on Academic staff
Sample: Undergraduate cohort with +1 clinical placement experience

Mixed Methods
Quantitative
5 question e-survey
Short, accessible, simple
Capture scale of the problem

Qualitative
40-minute Focus Groups x4
(6-8 people)
In-depth, subjective
Semi-Structured
Findings

Physiotherapy students are seeing standards of care-giving that concerns them on placements regularly and aren’t sure what to do about it.

Theme 1: Awareness of Francis report
Theme 2: Experiences of poor care
Theme 3: Differentiating good from bad care
Theme 4: Decision to report
Theme 5: Awareness of reporting pathway
Theme 6: Proposals for changes to reporting
Findings
EXPERIENCES OF POOR CARE

“They just didn’t seem very nice to the patients”

“There was an incident on my placement. Where a rehab assistant was making an impression of a patient with dementia”

“It’s like you go in and you're shocked and that shock becomes a part of this, that you just become like, ok this is how it is and this is all that they can get “

“I went to see a woman her curtains were drawn around her, she was left raised above the bed unsupervised in a hoist, being left there to go to the toilet with the bedpan underneath her”

“They left her six weeks, lying in bed because they didn't want to get in trouble …hoisting … they weren’t sure about it, and they didn’t even bother to call in to ask for clarification or anything and the patient just lost everything gained”
“Well I think. Another thing about ...good care, is just thinking holistically as well and not just focusing on the job you are going to do.”

“You’re a student but actually you’re sensible enough to know ‘This is right and this is wrong’, you learnt it when you were a 4 or 5 year old. If you truly believe something is wrong this is fundamentally an incorrect process”.

“...I didn’t feel comfortable at the time um it was near the end of the placement and erm you’re thinking about marks and you’re thinking about your relationship with them erm and then actually she had been a fantastic educator so then you think well actually she has been a really good educator she’s a really good physio, she was a really good physio from my point of view so surely it’s not that bad”
CREATING CHANGE

“it’s a really big ask to expect somebody to have the self-confidence and self-belief to think “That’s not right, I’ll go above”

“its difficult and because if you look at the hierarchy and you think I’m a student, what am I going to do to create change?”

“this for me [focus group discussion] is very very useful and actually a similar discussion in a class would be fantastic”

“it’s the feeling of going against something that’s much bigger than you, because what if it is down to budget constraints or shortage of staff”
Implications

Bearing in mind limitations of the study... this initial research suggests:

- Multiple cases of poor care observed
- Strong ideas of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ care
- Lack of confidence in ‘grey areas’
- Clinical placement impacts on the values/ideas of compassionate care
- Students feel ill equipped to impact on existing cultures
References


• Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (2011) *Code of members’ professional values and behaviour*


DISCUSSION POINTS

• Can we instill values of compassionate care at university (can we select applicants to physiotherapy on this basis)?

• What can clinical placement educators do to promote compassionate care amongst students?

• Can students change existing institutional cultures? If so how can we support them?