Pre-placement Orientation

Background
The introduction of a dedicated pre-placement orientation visit was undertaken as a result of classroom session relating to preparing the students undertaking RN/DipHE training (to whom I was group teacher) for their forthcoming hospital/community placements. It became clear that the students had concerns about starting their placement and particularly wanted to know what the ward/placement area and the staff ‘were like’ and voiced worries about being accepted and not knowing anything or anyone when they started their placement.

In previous curricula orientation visits had been arranged but the current curriculum did not allow any time for orientation visits. Having had experience of the value of such visits, I decided to explore their reintroduction.

Student nurses and stress related to placements
Cope, Cuthbertson and Stoddart (2000) recognise that when student start a new placement there are feelings of vulnerability some of which will be the same as any newcomer such as being unfamiliar with the routine, but that this vulnerability is amplified by novice status. They recognise that becoming a nurse is about joining the community of practice, but that this is rarely taken into account formally or in course planning.

Clinical experience is a crucial component of the professional socialization and professional development of nurses (Wong and Lee
Student nurses undertake a variety of placements in various healthcare settings and starting a placement can be very stressful resulting in feelings of inadequacy, anxiety and high levels of apprehension (Jack 1995) and anticipatory anxiety (Gray and Smith 2000). Admi (1997) identified that, for student nurses, the clinical experience is the most essential yet stressful experience in this process of professional socialisation. The stress and concerns experienced by student nurses prior to placements related to the staff they would be working with rather than the work they would be expected to undertake (Cahill 1996).

I saw the concept of an orientation visit as a quality issue to enhance effective learning. A good start to providing an effective learning environment is to provide an orientation programme (Wheeler 2001). As long ago as 1985, Price identified that reducing student nurses’ stress about new placements would benefit the registered nurse and ultimately the patients as students tend to work learn and work better when the stress is removed.

Introducing the Pre-placement orientation visits.
Permission was sought from my line manager to trial orientation visits with ‘my’ group. The Clinical Placement Facilitator was instrumental in preparing the placement staff and arranging the visits. We decided to call the visit ‘pre-placement orientation’ to emphasise that orientation needed to occur prior to the placement and not on commencement of the placement as happens with some orientation programmes.

Prociuk (1990) identifies that orientation should include activities and experiences that are planned. Similarly, we wanted our proposed visits
to be to have some structure and not merely a ‘visiting the placement’ exercise. To help provide structure a Pre-placement orientation sheet was devised for the students to complete during their orientation visit. Compiling the sheet involved input from the students, academic and service side colleagues, reviewing previous School of Health orientation material and consulting the Royal College of Nursing’s toolkit: Helping students get the best from their practice placements (Royal College of Nursing 2002).

Conclusion
The overriding influencing factor for introducing pre-placement orientation was to help the students prepare for their placement by visiting it beforehand to not only meet some of the staff and become orientated to the layout, but, most importantly to allay some of their fears and anxieties. From the feedback received, it has been a successful venture. Moreover, it serves to remind service colleagues of their need to plan for the students’ placements by e.g. arranging mentors in advance of the student’s starting the placement.

The pre-placement orientation visits have now been extended to include other cohorts of student nurses.

P.M.Wakefield                      F.Bayliss
Senior Lecturer                  Clinical Placement Facilitator
School of Health                Queen’s Hospital NHS Trust
Burton upon Trent               Burton upon Trent
References


