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Article

Evaluating 'reflective café' as a method of teaching reflective practice on Specialist Community Practitioner (SCP) and Specialist Community Public Health Nurse (SCPHN) programmes.

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Abstract

Background

Specialist Community Practitioner (SCP) and Specialist Community Public Health Nurse (SCPHN) students are required to evidence their competency by the use of reflective practice as part of the NMC proficiencies. A reflective café trilogy comprising of three reflective teaching sessions was developed and introduced into a university programme to support and encourage alternative methods for deeper reflection within this student group.

Aims

It was important for educators to evaluate if a reflective café met the student's needs and understand the usefulness of a 'reflective café' as a technique to support the process of reflecting on practice.

Methods

Evaluation was undertaken using an online questionnaire

Findings

Students evaluated if the reflective café was useful for their own development and identified that the number of sessions met their developmental needs.

Conclusion

The potential to develop alternative methods to reflect was recognised and the team plan to develop other reflective processes to support students in the future.

Introduction

Reflective practice is a core component of nursing which can be difficult to define but is considered to be the process of channelling thoughtful practice to learn from situations, (Jarvis, 1992). There are calls for all nurses to establish positive 'reflection behaviours' to improve self-care and ensure that they are better prepared to understand their own strengths and weaknesses, (Robinson, 2020). Concept analysis of reflective practice in nursing, advocates the use of reflection and self-awareness strategies, and the development of different methods seeks to improve reflection before, during, and after clinical experiences, (Patel and Metersky 2021). The Specialist Community Practitioner (SCP) and Specialist Community Public Health Nursing (SCPHN) programmes, lead to a recordable qualification and advanced skills which equip practitioners to lead the delivery of quality, safe care, and exercise higher levels of decision making, (Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), 2001, NMC 2004). SCP/SCPHN students are required to demonstrate and provide evidence of their learning in practice by completion of a practice evidence tool (PET). Within the PET document, students must include several reflective accounts to validate their learning in practice and relate to the Nursing and Midwifery Standards for Specialist Practice, to demonstrate competence in practice (NMC 2001, NMC 2006). The academic team developed a new method of delivery to support reflective practice and evaluated how these were received by the students.

Background

Strategies such as reflective practice and compassionate leadership are of great importance to positively change behaviour and are regarded as social, moral, and economic priorities, (Bailey, 2021). Compassionate leadership refers to the creation of structures which promote a healthy containment of anxiety and support for individuals to channel positive and adaptive responses when faced with challenging experiences in practice, (de Zulueta, 2016).

A recent NHS staff survey (Picker Institute Europe, 2020) exposed that 44% of staff reported

feeling unwell as a result of work-related stress and a decline in mental health (Thomas and Quilter-Pinner, 2020). A Royal College of Nursing (RCN) (2020a) survey discovered 76% of nurses believed their personal stress levels have increased, leaving them at risk of burnout. Whilst it was noted that during the pandemic community nurses worked in increased isolation due to social distancing measures, another possible cause of elevated stress levels, (QNI, 2020a, PHE, 2020).

The Queens Nursing Institute (QNI) (2021) Strategic plan 2021-2025 identified there are fundamental changes to the demographics in healthcare since 2020. These changes are thought to be caused in part by the Covid 19 pandemic, an ageing population with progressively complex health needs, insufficient staffing levels and no limit to caseload capacity, (NHS, 2019, McKinless, 2020). Consequently, the approach and pace of health care services and the work delivered is almost unrecognisable from pre pandemic levels, putting extra pressure on the workforce to deliver, (Patel, Thomas and Quilter-Pinner, 2021).

Reflective teaching sessions are a core component of SCP/SCPHN programmes, and the academic team developed the notion of the 'Reflective café' as its pedagogy. The sessions aim to support students to develop reflective skills by facilitating reflective learning activities and debriefing opportunities. Students are encouraged to share, pragmatically critique, and learn from reflective stories (over coffee) in a supportive and confidential environment. Prior to these sessions students would engage in clinical supervision aligned within their own trusts and formal reflective sessions were taught in the university setting with learning outcomes focusing on models of reflection and portfolio documentation.

Three sessions were integrated into the current programme in the university, which span the academic year. Students from community child nursing, school nursing, health visiting, and district nursing were all present and invited to each session. The groups initially were divided to incorporate individuals from all fields, but students were free to circulate during the sessions to discuss their own experiences with others. The second and final sessions led

the students to group themselves into smaller discussion groups and time was provided for students to have individual discussions with practice assessors (PA) and practice supervisors (PS) to maximise the use of this opportunity. Sessions were scheduled as half a day but extra time was allocated and tutors available to address any problems or provide emotional support should this be required. Common ground rules were established during induction of the programme for all adjoined group sessions and these formed the basis of the reflective café to provide a confidential and safe space to learn.

The first session introduced reflective practice, by process of a group workshop session between student and tutors, with some taught materials. This was staged in a relaxed open teaching space, which revisited and explored reflective models and the students underpinning baseline knowledge. At this session the importance of integrating reflection within the practice portfolio document to support the evidence base for the NMC SCP/SCPHN competencies was launched. The second session gave a clear direction on methods of reflection the students could adopt. These were in the form of storytelling, digital reflections by using visual video recordings, verbal narratives or PowerPoint presentations, to encourage creativity. Examples of these formats were demonstrated to the students and academic staff also took the opportunity to engage in reflection via recordings and the above methods to illustrate how reflection by different formats can be achieved. The final session of the 'trilogy' aimed to improve resilience through the medium of reflection and included the tutors, students, and PA and PS. Inviting PA and PS promotes collaboration with NHS practice partners and ensures commitment to focus on student wellbeing. Studies have demonstrated that facilitating workplace learning and reflection during nurse education can empower nurses to develop their capabilities and contributes to exceptional patient care, (Jantzen, 2019, Walsh et al, 2020). This is something the academic team strive for, to equip SCP/SCPHN students with the skills for lifelong reflection and to support others.

A local college specialising in health and beauty were invited to provide complimentary treatments to create a holistic environment conducive to personal interaction. This was a

mutually beneficial arrangement and a welcome face to face addition, particularly after the isolated period throughout covid. The beauty students were able to offer treatments such as hand and nail treatments, massages, hair styling in a relaxed environment. Areas in the university used for student events were commandeered for the final session to provide privacy and facilitate the necessary equipment to enable therapies to take place. There was no specific reference to the health and beauty interventions during the evaluation but the team aim to include this in future evaluations.

Aim

The evaluation aimed to gather information and data to understand the usefulness of 'reflective café' as a technique to support the process of reflecting on practice. The team would adjust and build on aspects identified by students that worked well and looking to modify areas which were not well received.

Method

A questionnaire was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the reflective café teaching sessions for the SCP/SCPHN students to consider teaching and content. An online questionnaire was developed with the ten short questions that aimed to identify the value of the reflective café in relation to students' learning. Students were sent the anonymous survey link via a block email. A Likert scale was used to simplify the data collection and guide the questionnaire statements to enable responses positively or negatively, it is a useful tool for application in the field of social sciences, psychology and nursing, (Likert, 1932, Pimentel and Pimentel, 2019).

The participants were students enrolled on the SCP/SCPHN programmes in the academic year 2021.22 of which there were 34 students comprising of 15 District Nurses (DNs), 4 Community children's nurses (CCN's), 15 SCPHNs. 32 students completed the questionnaire a response rate of 94% percent. The high response rate provided data to

represent the views of this cohort. Students were encouraged via an email reminder to complete the online survey and were also encouraged to complete this at the SCP/SCPHN annual conference. This approach could have contributed to the high response rate in addition to the speed and ease to complete the online survey via a website link.

Results

Figure.1
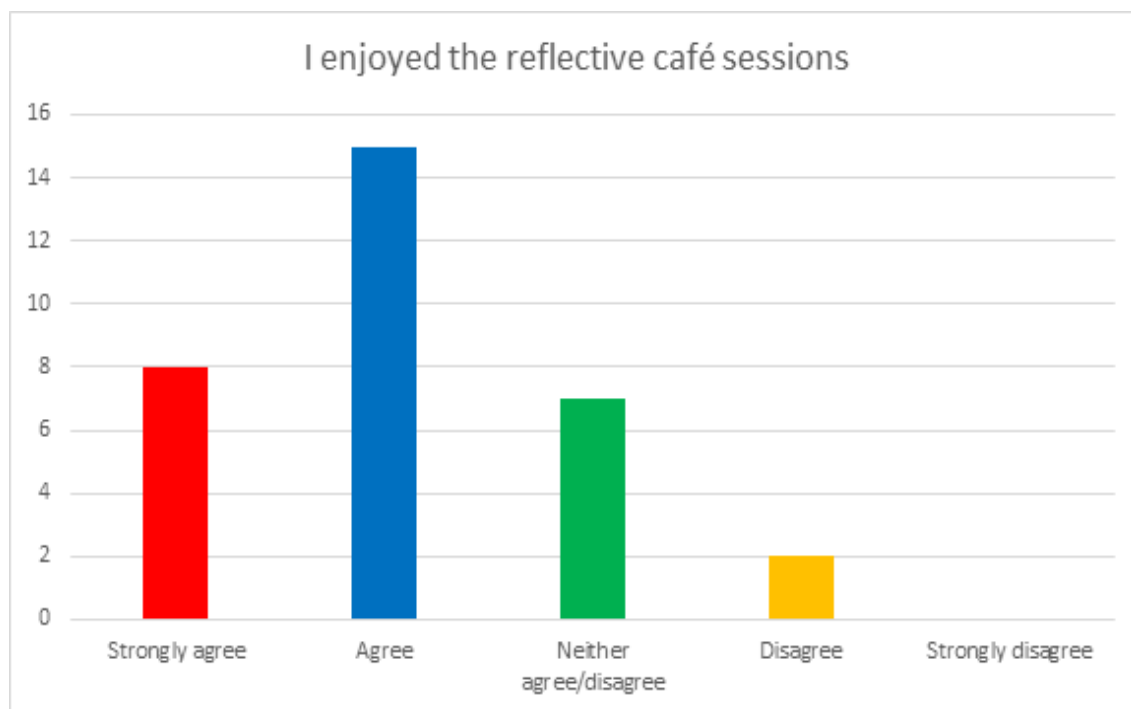
Students were asked to rate the statement 'I enjoyed the reflective café sessions'. 72% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed the reflective café sessions. 6%t did not enjoy the sessions and 22% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. No student strongly disagreed.

The online survey did not allow for additional narrative therefore it is impossible to identify what students enjoyed or did not enjoy about the reflective café sessions. A recommendation for the programme team is to develop an online questionnaire to gain greater information in this respect from the 2022.23 cohort of SCP/SCPHN students.

Figure.2

My ability to reflect deeply was enhanced following the reflective café sessions
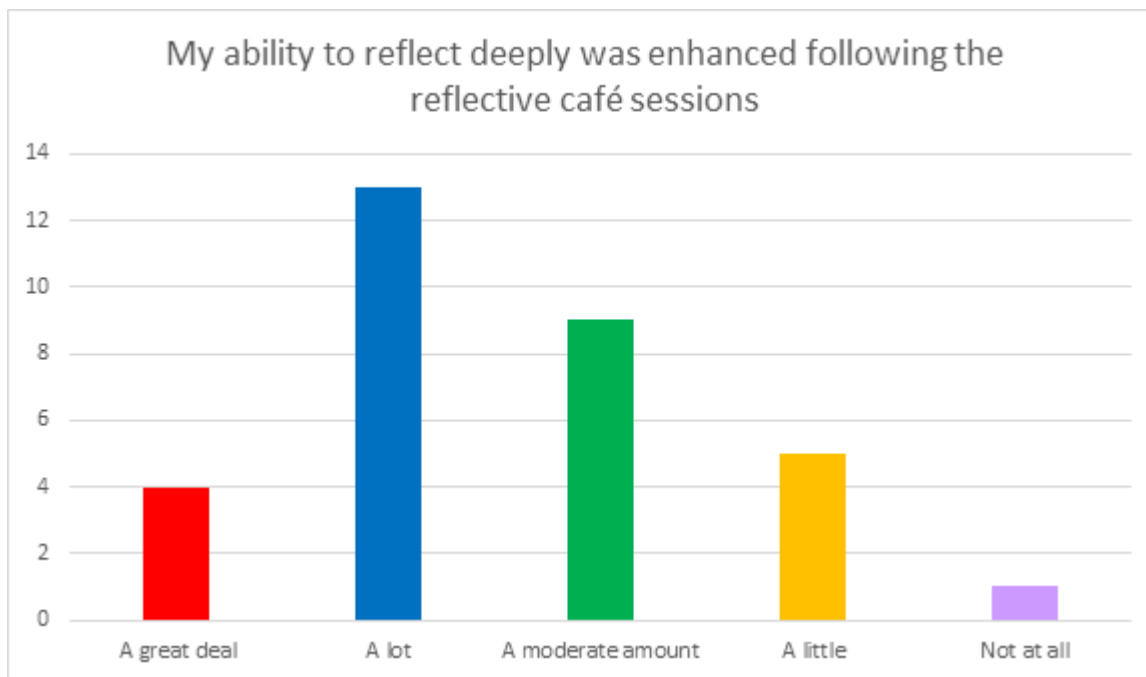
92% of students indicated their ability to reflect deeply was enhanced by the reflective café sessions. Most students indicated their ability to reflect deeply was enhanced either by a lot or by a moderate amount. Only two students did not feel the sessions made any impact to their reflective ability. Without any additional narrative, it is difficult to clarify how students' reflective abilities had been enhanced.

Question 3, 'The ability to reflect is a key component of specialist practice'.

All but one student either agreed or strongly agreed that the ability to reflect deeply is a key component of specialist practice. No student disagreed with this statement. This reinforces the value of supporting reflective practice within the SCP/SCPHN programmes. Thinking about the reflective café sessions, no students felt there were too many built into the SCP/SCPHN programmes. Most students felt the number of sessions were correct however, eight students would have liked more sessions, indicating that currently there are too few sessions. The team will consider this feedback for next year, to facilitate additional 'drop in' sessions and increase online content for students who may benefit from further support.

Figure.3

Content within the reflective café sessions was relevant to my level of study
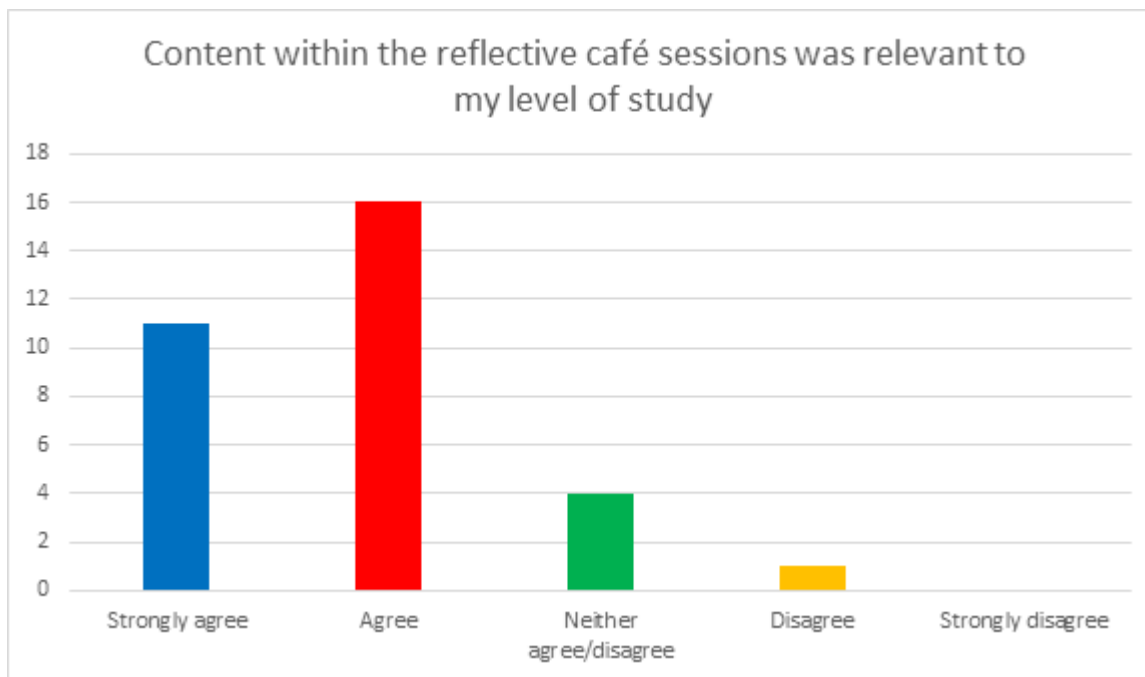
Students were asked to rate reflective café in relevance to the level of study. It is an important consideration given that both level 6 and level 7 students are taught together on the SCP/SCPHN programmes. 84% evaluated the content of the reflective café sessions relevant to their level of study. Four students neither agreed or disagreed with the statement and one student disagreed.

It is difficult without any additional information to determine if the student who disagreed with the statement felt the content was above or beneath their level of study. This question will be expanded for the evaluation of the reflective café in 2022.23 either with a narrative box or with the inclusion of an additional question to determine this.

Question 6 *'Did you attempt a different format for your reflection e.g.,* video?

Three students indicated they attempted a different format for their reflection; this can include audio, video, a collage or anything creative that will enable students to demonstrate their learning and competence in practice through reflection.

Only 9% of students attempted a different reflective format. The team will consider strategies aimed at increasing the number of students attempting a more creative approach to their reflections for the coming academic year.

Two of the three students who attempted a different format for their reflection found the process either easy or very easy. One student indicated they found this neither easy nor difficult. This result provides limited information to the team due to the low response rate. It may be that students who did not attempt a different format for their reflection perceived the process to be difficult thus preventing their attempt.

Interestingly, 96% of students felt there was enough guidance and information made available to help them produce a different format for reflection.

The team will consider what might be preventing students from attempting a different reflective format if they feel enough support and guidance is made available.

Question 8 asked students to consider if reflective practice can aid staff well-being and resilience. One hundred percent of students either agree or strongly agree that reflection on practice can aid staff well-being and resilience.

Figure.4
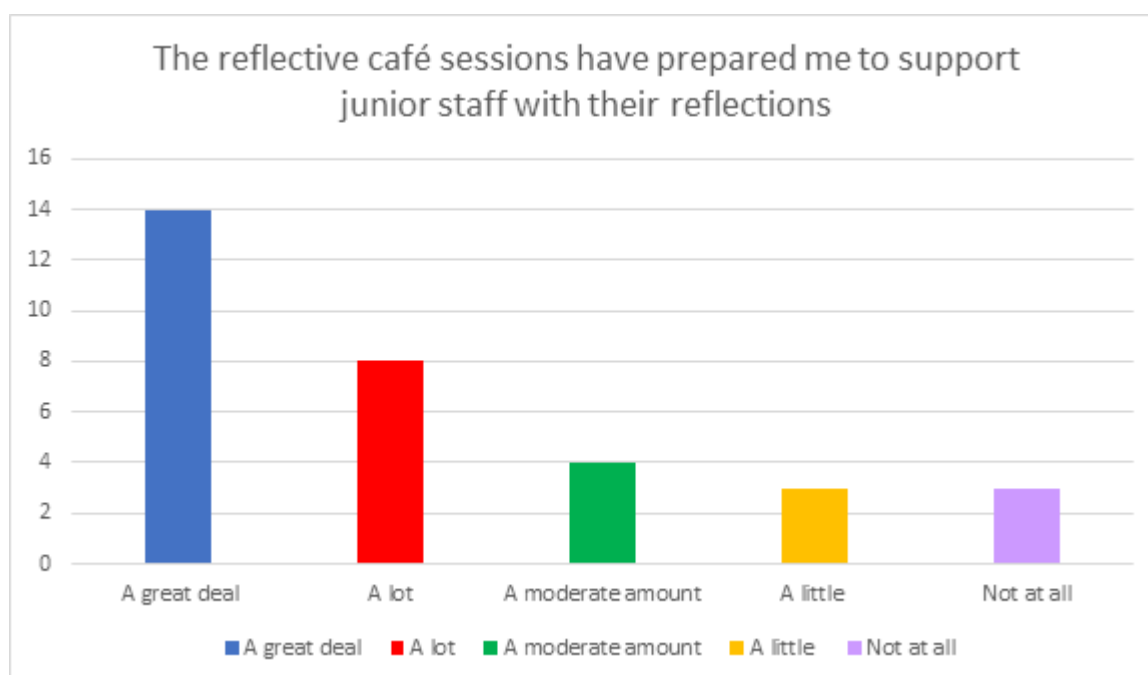
Ninety-one percent of students indicated that the reflective café session sessions have prepared them to support junior staff with their reflections. Sixty-nine percent indicated that the reflective café sessions had prepared them either a great deal or a lot.

Limitations

Sample size was small but the volume of students on the SCP and SCPHN programmes are fewer. An online survey did not allow for additional narrative therefore it is impossible to identify what students enjoyed or did not enjoy about the reflective café sessions. The multiple-choice element meant that there was little scope for narrative to deeper understand the reasons behind the responses.

Discussion

Reflective formats

How a professional reflects is crucial to learning that evolves from the process (Dewey 1963). Reflective models are known to help guide the process of reflection and there are many to choose from, each with different interpretations of the reflective process. Choosing the right model to guide reflection is key, it needs to be a good fit not only to support reflective learning styles, but also the subject being reflected upon, acting as a tool to bridge the gap between theory and the world of clinical practice, Choperena et al, 2019). Arguably, in addition to choosing the right reflective model, the format used to present a reflection is of equal importance and it is suggested, can make the difference between deep or superficial learning (Urstad et al 2018). Students should be given the creative space and freedom to not only choose a model of reflection to guide their reflective process but also the freedom to choose a format to present it that best suits their learning style if deep learning is to occur (Schwind 2008). Formats for presenting a reflection can include but are not limited to; digital storytelling, poems, picture collages, videos, PowerPoint presentations and voice

recordings. Digital storytelling describes a simple, creative process through which people with little or no experience in computer film-making gain skills needed to tell a personal story/reflection.

The evaluation established a low number of students attempted a different reflective format despite the support available, although the results did not differentiate between the alternative formats used and therefore cannot be explored further. However, there is strong evidence to suggest deep learning occurs following students' involvement in digital reflective activities (Christiansen 2011, Sandars & Murray 2009 and Goldingay et al 2018). Digital storytelling for example, can be a powerful transformative reflective experience for students, Marin et al (2017) found it enhanced student learning and enabled them to develop new and differing perspectives and Urstad et al (2018) found students reflected deeply, effectively integrating theoretical perspectives into reflective accounts. Similarly, Paladias & Wood (2016), described how reflective storytelling enabled student nurses to make sense of their experiences and develop a greater understanding of the theory underpinning practice. Digital reflective activities also enhance students' digital literacy skills enabling them to realise and appreciate the importance of ICT in practice, (Clarke & Adam 2010, Skidmore et al 2019, Marin et al, 2017).

Employing a different format for reflection can help support students who struggle academically. Using a more creative format to present their reflections students are able to focus less on their language and sentence structure and more on their experience and learning (Urstad et al, 2018, Jack and Illingworth 2019, Goldingay et al 2018). It is argued, that not only does this increase student enjoyment in the activity but also enhances learning (McLeod, Barr and welch, 2015) and is therefore a useful strategy to employ. Nevertheless, the students responded that the reflective café and methods of reflection they had used had helped them to reflect more deeply.

Reflection supporting resilience

With current issues related to poor staff mental health and well-being highlighted as a significant issue throughout the NHS (NHS, 2019) it is imperative that the SCP/SCPHN programme team continue to support students to develop their reflective skills with the aim to build resilient practitioners. Resilience is a key developmental area for SCP/SCPHN students, as aspirant NHS leaders, they will be expected to support staff and improve personal wellbeing and efficiency, (Chada, 2018). Studies indicate that although resilience is often considered an innate characteristic, some think that cognitive attributes can be taught and the adoption of behavioural techniques and evaluation of challenging situations may provide opportunities to learn and grow resilience in the workplace, (Chada, 2018, Jackson, Firtko and Edenborough, 2007). Furthermore, reflection in nursing is a mandatory requirement for revalidation for NMC (NMC 2004).

The questionnaire was positive with its findings that all the students felt the teaching strategy supported resilience in practice. This is important, due to growing pressures of jobs and responsibilities, it could be argued that reflection is necessary as a tool for resilience (Thomas and Asselin, 2018). Reflection permits individuals to revisit an episode of care, incidents, good practice etc, and by using structured reflective models, it can breakdown the event into categories that can support decision making, leadership and give direction on how to move forward in job roles, (Finlay, 2018).

To use reflection as a tool for resilience is important for practitioners so that time is given to process the event safely and effectively. This may be done either individually in which the practitioner can reflect during their working day and look at prioritising their tasks, organising themselves and thinking about what they need to do next, this can support resilience as the practitioner can feel in control when task maybe overwhelming. Alternatively, reflection with peers in groups during a supervision session may be beneficial that shares practice and

promotes a supportive team (Williams and You, 2021).

For SCPHN/SCP students, using reflection can strengthen confidence in a new role, and may also spark questions or ideas about future working. This can inspire students and facilitate a good working relationship with their supervisor/assessor, which in turn can equip students for prospective roles by enhancing the learning experience and increasing their confidence, (Wareing at al, 2018).

Supporting nurses to reflect

Reflection on practice is anticipated from an undergraduate level moving into qualification and is critical in improving communication, clinical abilities and personal confidence, (Kim et al, 2018). The questionnaire highlighted that the students felt more prepared to support more junior staff in practice after attending these sessions. The NMC requirements for revalidation feature reflection to encourage a sharing culture which seeks to improve care, (NMC, 2021). However, Hunter and Cook's (2018) study focused on professional socialisation for new graduate nurses observing that role modelling and a 'hidden curriculum' was significant in the formation of professional identity. Therefore, the skills learnt from assessors and supervisors can shape the inclusion of reflection in nurse practice and may uphold the notion that reflection is essential to practice effectively. A curative, biomedical framework devoid of emotion can mean nurses are at risk of losing themselves emotionally, (Smith, 1998, Hendricks- Thomas and Patterson, 1995). Strategies such as self-regulated learning models can support teaching and learning in respect to reflective clinical reasoning, whilst team-based interdisciplinary learning can foster positive professional behaviours and active learning styles, in addition to theoretical models which support reflective processes, (Kuiper and Pesut, 2004, Oldland et al, 2017). The assumption that once qualified, nurses know how to constructively reflect should not be made, on the contrary, reflection is a lifelong journey and further education is required to ensure this message is passed on to students, (Lubbe

and Botha, 2020, Grech, 2021). A structured learning plan endorsing reflection, such as 'reflective café' is known to prepare students for the higher level of clinical practice and the transformational leadership required for the specialist practitioner qualification, (Ginger and Ritchie, 2017).

Recommendations

Exploration of the alternative formats used by other students for reflection would be helpful, to establish if these approaches can encourage other students who favour traditional methods. Further recommendations are to continue the partnership working with the local college to ensure the continuation of the holistic treatment and well-being events. There is opportunity to evaluate the students experience of the wellbeing events and the potential benefits to this student group of combining holistic treatments to enhance reflective practice. Collaborative working must be valued beyond the university setting, with networking between other organisations. The introduction of NHS practice partners to the sessions was vital, to upskill the clinicians assessing and supervising students on other modes of reflection they may not have used themselves and create an inclusive environment. Overall, a further qualitative study is necessary to give students scope for expansion on their answers and gain a deeper understanding of how to improve prospective sessions and participant experiences.

Conclusion

This evaluation reinforces to the SCP/SCPHN programme team that the reflective café sessions are an invaluable addition to the programme. It is also recognised that reflection remains an essential tool to support nurses in their role and can be used to enhance their practice which links to better patient outcomes. The link between reflection and wellbeing is evident and 'reflective café' offers an opportunity for community clinicians to develop positive reflection habits to share as best practice with others.

Key points

•Evidencing reflective practice is a vital part of NMC proficiencies for SCP/SCPHN students.

•SCP/SCPHN students recognise the value of reflective practice and other methods can encourage deeper reflection.

•The use of innovative educational approaches can help SCP/SCPHN students develop and sustain reflection on practice.

Reflective questions

Consider the current methods of reflection you currently use to support your practice.

Do you consider a reflective model the key to deeper reflection in practice?

What support structures are needed to support positive 'reflective behaviours' in clinical practice?

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