



Active involvement of learning disabilities service users in the development and delivery of a teaching session to pre-registration nurses: Students' perspectives



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ABSTRACT

A teaching session about service users' experiences of accessing and receiving health and social care was designed and delivered by service users to first year BSc Nursing students. The aim was to enhance students' knowledge, skills and confidence in caring for people with a learning disability. An evaluation research study was undertaken at one university in London into the perceived effectiveness of the teaching session, including students' perceptions of the extent to which the service users' teaching session was useful, the impact of the session, its benefits and challenges and the sustainability of teaching sessions delivered by service users. Data were collected through an online questionnaire. Quantitative analysis was undertaken of Likert-style questions and qualitative analysis was undertaken using the Framework Method. The session impacted on students' knowledge and understanding of people with a learning disability. Students reported that they felt more comfortable and confident interacting with people with a learning disability. In addition, they reflected on their feelings about caring for people with a learning disability.

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Introduction

The aim of this project was to enhance nursing students' knowledge, skills and confidence in caring for people with a learning disability. People who have a learning disability have complex physical and mental health needs, yet experience lower levels of health care provision than the general population (Michael, 2008). One identified organisational barrier to accessing services is disabling attitudes among healthcare staff (Emerson and Baines, 2010). Student nurses from all fields of nursing might be working with children and adults who have a learning disability. It is therefore crucial that all student nurses have a sound understanding of what having a learning disability might mean for an individual and to develop knowledge, skills and confidence in working with this group of people.

Within the School of Nursing at Kingston University and St George's, University of London, a need was identified to provide first year students from all four fields of nursing (adult, child,

learning disabilities and mental health) with more experiences with people with a learning disability. As part of the teaching and learning strategy, service users and carers were invited to develop and deliver teaching sessions in year 1.

This article describes the teaching session that was designed and delivered by learning disability service users and their carers, and an evaluation study that was undertaken into students' experiences of attending the session.

Literature review

In the United Kingdom (UK) service user and carer involvement is increasing its focus on involving patients and the public in shaping and delivering healthcare and healthcare education (Department of Health (DH), 2004, 2005, 2006; Forrest et al., 2000; Towle et al., 2010; NMC, 2010). Service user and carer involvement has been at the centre of the UK government's strategy to modernise public services (DH, 2005; DH, 2010; DH, 2012). Service users are no longer seen as passive recipients of care but as customers and experts. Whilst increased service user involvement in nurse education mirrors recent UK government policy focus, it should be noted that the involvement of service users in nurse

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education also address educational and professional drivers (Bollard et al., 2012).

The past two decades have seen increased service user involvement in the delivery and development of healthcare education, with the general consensus that there are benefits for all those involved (Speed et al., 2012). The service user movement has also been influential in driving these developments forward (Brown and Young, 2008) as has a reduction of the public trust in health care professions generally highlighted by a number of high profile enquiries in the UK (Higgins et al., 2011; Francis, 2010, 2013). The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and the Health Professions Council (HPC), the professions' regulatory bodies in the United Kingdom, require service user involvement in the development and delivery of all pre-registration courses (NMC, 2010; HPC, 2011). However, no specific information is provided with regards to how this could or should be accomplished. While service user involvement in professional education has increased over the years, there is still a disparity between the philosophy of service user involvement and the pragmatics of putting it into practice (Lathlean et al., 2006).

Service user involvement in curriculum design

For decades, curriculum planners in nursing education in the UK have been expected to involve service users in curriculum design and development (DH, 2004, 2005, 2006; NMC, 2010; HPC, 2011). Studies have been undertaken into the impact and benefits of service user involvement in curriculum planning. Gutteridge and Dobbins (2010) for example undertook a survey of 20 academic staff in one university about their experiences in service user involvement in curriculum development. Some of their findings will be explored later in this literature review.

Service user involvement in assessment/feedback on practice

Much of the research into service user involvement in education is largely focused on the processes of service user involvement. For example, several studies identified the need for protocols and guidance for service users as a structure for their assessment of/feedback to students and academic staff (Levin, 2004; Speers, 2008; Anghel and Ramon, 2009; Stickley et al., 2010; Charles et al., 2006; Bailey, 2005). Indeed, much of the literature into service user involvement in professional education focuses on service user role in assessment of competence in clinical practice.

Barksby (2014) undertook a study of service users' perceptions of student nurses, where the service users were people with a learning disability and resident in a long stay care setting. Working with this client group can present challenges in terms of communication and their understanding of who student nurses are and what they are there for. Barksby (2014) found that service users were largely positive about student nurses and the care they received from them although a small percentage were indifferent to the presence of student nurses in their care home. Although the study was not about service users' contribution to education, it provided useful feedback on student nurse performance and competence in a learning disability setting.

Service user involvement in classroom teaching

There is a lack of research investigating the benefits of service user involvement in teaching nursing students (Tee, 2012). Gutteridge and Dobbins (2010) argued that the central focus of service user involvement is: "does this involvement enhance student learning?" (Gutteridge and Dobbins, 2010, p. 512). There is a need to discover how or why learning is enhanced through service

user involvement in classroom teaching (LeVar, 2002; Gutteridge and Dobbins, 2010).

Hanson and Mitchell (2001) explored a 5-day course of preparation provided to enable service users in teaching mental health nursing students in the classroom. One of the intended benefits of training service users to be effective in teaching mental health nursing students was to offer students a different way of viewing mental health patients so that the students would move away from the notion of mental health patients as being always dependent upon nurses.

Benefits to students and their practice of service user involvement

Although there is literature on the benefits of service user involvement to the service users themselves. The studies into service user involvement identified benefits for students, service users and the education provider. This part of the literature, however, focuses on the benefits to students as this has particular relevance for the study presented later in this article. Giving students an opportunity to learn about the perspectives and experiences of service users in a supportive environment has the potential to enhance professional understanding (Horne et al., 2010). Students have the opportunity to see service users in a different light, valuing them as experts. Involvement can be a positive experience for service users in developing new skills and confidence; it also creates opportunities for the education provider to engage with the local health care community (Warne and McAndrew, 2005).

Nursing practice can be influenced and improved by developing the students' understanding of the service user and carer experiences which can help to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Costello and Horne, 2001). Indeed, Costello and Horne (2001) found that having service user involvement in education enables students to gain insight into the experience of service users, a finding supported by Stickley et al. (2010). Students have described exposure to service users in their education as making the student experience "real" (Anghel and Ramon, 2009; Schneebeli et al., 2010; Atkinson and Williams, 2011; Skilton, 2011).

Another benefit to students is that having service user involvement in student learning challenges students' assumptions and stereotypes (Schneebeli et al., 2010; Thomson and Hilton, 2012).

One of the limitations of the literature generally into the benefits to students is that many of the studies were undertaken into one-off examples of service user involvement in nursing education. It could be argued that progress can still be made in establishing a culture where service users are routinely acknowledged as part of the workforce contributing to all aspects of development and delivery of the curriculum. This could be further encouraged by the development of a more robust research base (Tee, 2012).

There is an absence of substantive research into service user involvement in learning disabilities nursing. However, other areas of nursing education (e.g., mental health) where research has been undertaken into the benefits to students, e.g. mental health, social work, allied health professions (e.g. Repper and Breeze, 2006), may be transferable to exploring the benefits to students when they are learning about people with learning difficulties. Horne et al. (2010) explored nurse educators' perceptions of good practice, attitudes, beliefs, advantages and challenges with regard to engaging and involving service users in teaching. They found that educators perceived that using service users in teaching students can help to develop positive attitudes and empathy for service users by students. The study also identified perceived challenges including how to involve service users with large groups of students and how to ensure that the experiences of a few service users can be perceived as being representative of the larger service user population.

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