How to learn more effectively
‘Students should feel supported effectively as adult learners, and this is likely to result in them having some control over their learning experience’
rcni.com/learn-effectively

When the father of nursing student Jemma Lenkowiec had a life-threatening illness, it taught her the importance of keeping patients’ relatives informed. ‘This experience has changed the way I communicate with patients and their relatives’
rcni.com/loved-one

REFLECTIVE ESSAY

Learning through leadership
A third-year student gained valuable experience and skills by teaching other students how to insert nasogastric tubes

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Almost 800,000 nasogastric tubes are used in the NHS each year. They are used regularly in children’s nursing, particularly on neonatal units and children’s wards over the winter bronchiolitis season.

For some students, particularly on their first placement, fitting nasogastric tubes can be a daunting prospect as this procedure is not usually covered in taught theory sessions.

Nasogastric tube insertion through the nose and into the stomach is usually taught by a mentor on a clinical placement using a real child or baby, which can be stressful.

As such, I wanted to arrange a theory session with first-year students during their preparation for a placement workshop about nasogastric feeding and tube insertion, to cover measuring guidelines, aspiration techniques and pH indicator strip testing.

I wanted the students to understand why testing is so important and to discuss the potential consequences of not adhering to guidelines and the related patient safety implications.

The children’s nursing lecturers helped me plan my session and provided me with a transparent dummy that had an oesophagus, trachea and movable epiglottis, meaning I could demonstrate measuring and insertion of the tubes. Students could then practise the procedure in a safe, controlled environment under supervision.

We discussed holding techniques such as swaddling, because it can be difficult to hold a child who is moving, as well as how to obtain an aspirate using a syringe, the importance of obtaining an aspirate before every feed, what to do if an aspirate cannot be obtained and the potential risks of the tube being misplaced.

More confident

Feedback from students showed that they found the session informative and felt much more comfortable and confident about the prospect of caring for children requiring nasogastric feeding. It is satisfying to think that by helping to ensure the next generation of students are trained correctly, I can help to improve patient care and safety in the future.

I gained valuable teaching experience through organising and planning the session. It enhanced my confidence and leadership skills, as I was able to improve the ability of the first-year students to challenge bad practice and maintain patient safety.

By reflecting on and discussing my experiences on placement with the students and answering their questions, I was able to consolidate my own knowledge, which is an important element of the revalidation process required by the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

In the future, I will use this valuable experience to develop my mentorship skills and it will be a sound starting point if I decide to pursue a career in clinical education.