



Findings of an Investigation Into the Impact of an Accreditation System on Physiotherapy Undergraduate Clinical Education

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PURPOSE: To identify if the process of accreditation of clinical placements for physiotherapy undergraduates has influenced clinical educators perceptions of the advantages/disadvantages of having students on placement. **RELEVANCE:** United Kingdom(UK) Government Health and Social Care strategy since 1997 has identified the need to ensure the quality of the learning experience at a time when numbers of physiotherapists in training have increased in line with the National Health Service Plan (2000). In an attempt to ensure both the equity and the quality of the learning experience three North West universities developed an accreditation system for both clinical educators and for clinical education providers. In order to investigate the impact of the accreditation system on the learning environment a Delphi type study was implemented which progressed through 3 stages. **SUBJECTS:**For the purposes of the study an expert was defined as either an experienced clinical educator or the manager of a clinical site which has established links with the higher education providers (HEI's) concerned. To identify inter-group differences the sample was divided into four groups of group (A) accredited clinical educators (n=24), group (B) non accredited clinical educators (n=24), group (C) accredited clinical education providers (n=6) and group (D) non accredited clinical education providers (n=8). **METHODS AND MATERIALS:** All stages involved postal survey of the experts. In stage 1 participants were asked to identify the advantages/disadvantages of the clinical education process. The emergent themes from this stage were distributed in stage 2 and participants asked to rank order them. In addition a section was provided for further comment. Stage 3 involved circulation of rankings in order to attain intra-group agreement. **ANALYSES:** The issues identified using a thematic approach in stage 1 were ranked in stage 2 and analysed for agreement using Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test (95% confidence interval) and Spearman Rank Order Test (0.1 level, 2 tailed). The 'open' section in stage 2 was analysed using a thematic approach. Analysis of stage 3 is currently in progress. **RESULTS :** Key themes emerged from stage 1 which indicated the advantages/disadvantages of undergraduate clinical education. The statistical tests used in stage 2 showed no significant difference between groups but poor levels of agreement within groups. Qualitative analysis of the open section in stage 2 identified differences in perception of the clinical education process by accredited and non accredited clinicians. **CONCLUSIONS:** Until consensus is reached within each group as to the advantages/disadvantages of the clinical education process it is not possible to state whether the accreditation process has influenced the perceptions of clinical educators.

