

**A Novel Development of Peer Assisted Learning in an Undergraduate Physiotherapy Programme in the United Kingdom**

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**PURPOSE:** This paper describes the development of a peer assisted learning (PAL) scheme in an undergraduate physiotherapy programme and highlights strategies that are both helpful and unhelpful. **RELEVANCE:** The growing demand for undergraduate places in physiotherapy has led to larger cohorts of students in UK universities. This requires innovative methods of engagement of small group learning. PAL schemes have been successfully implemented to supplement course delivery in other disciplines worldwide (Capstick et al 2003, Congos & Schoeps 1998). Although evidence is growing for peer learning in the clinical environment (Baldry-Currens & Bithell 2003), evidence of PAL in the academic environment in physiotherapy is limited. **DESCRIPTION:** PAL sessions were established as part of the curriculum in the first year cohort (n=72) of an undergraduate physiotherapy programme. Students agreed a leader from the group and discussion topics for each session. Guidelines were provided on selection of topics and facilitation of group enquiry. Sessions aimed to facilitate critical thinking and team working, essential skills for clinical placements. **OBSERVATIONS:** Evaluation showed that PAL helped with learning from others and obtaining others' perspectives, with clarifying basic concepts and with giving them the opportunity to discuss matters away from the course tutors. Students praised the concept of PAL but some felt ill prepared and unsure what to do in a session. Average attendance for the timetabled 3 sessions was 2.5 and 20% of students continued to meet informally. **CONCLUSIONS:** Based on our experience it is recommended that greater investment should be made into helping students to structure the sessions more effectively. Establishment of such a process early in the course may be seen as resource intensive but sowing the seed early will provide the framework for problem solving and collaborative working for more self-sufficient PAL in latter years.