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Penelope Engel-Hills Abstract Presentation

Title:

The student perspective on professional role models

Key Words:

role model, professional education, health care practitioner, professional attributes

Context

Professional education in the health sciences relies on the qualified practitioners to mentor and supervise students during their work placements. These professionals play an important role in shaping the professional growth of the students through providing good examples of professional behaviour, attitude and competence. This can be seen as taking on the identity of a role model.

Aims

The aim of this study was to explore whether in fact our students identified qualified staff in the work place as role models and to examine the student perspectives of the reasons why a practitioner would be considered as a role model by the student.

Method

The target population was radiography students at four work place sites in the Western Cape. Questionnaires were administered to a sample of 105 students that represented all levels and radiography categories of the 3-year National Diploma. Focus group interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 5 students to further explore the notion of role models from the position of the student.

Results

73 responses (69%) to the questionnaire were returned. 54 (70%) of students indicated that they identified a role model. The themes that emerged to describe role models can be captured as descriptive of the person and the professional. A critical shift in terms of favoured criteria for a role model was identified for students in the early phase (year 1) as compared to those in the late phase (year 3).

Conclusions

Not all students identified a clinical role model during the work placement component of a work integrated learning curriculum. First year students have a different view of a role model as compared to senior students. Further research is needed to determine how this impacts on professional education. Listening to our students can give us a deeper understanding of the place of role models that will lead to curriculum enhancement through the promotion of positive role models that facilitate professional growth?