

An Interprofessional bariatric training: Safe manual handling techniques for healthcare students

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Background

Obesity (BMI of over 30kg/m²) is a growing problem affecting over a quarter of adults in England (HSE, 2017). This has a huge detrimental effect on the health and wellbeing of those affected by it, as it often leads to an increase in type 2 diabetes, stroke, cancer, heart disease and mental health issues (PHE, 2018). Additionally, UK hospital admissions are impacted by obesity, with over 10,000 admissions being directly relating to obesity and a further 617,000 admissions where obesity was stated as being a contributory factor. PHE (2018) highlight the importance of all staff taking opportunities to make every contact count with regard to public health concerns. Therefore, given how many people live with obesity, multidisciplinary teams require the appropriate knowledge and skills to deliver safe and effective care. This view is supported by NICE within their obesity guidance, which recommends that staff should be appropriately trained to use specialised equipment (NICE, 2014). Thus, it is necessary to educate future healthcare professionals how to care for these patients safely.

It has long been recognised that interprofessional education at all levels within healthcare, but particularly at undergraduate levels, can lead to the enhanced education of students and lead to greater patient safety (Barr, Helme & D'Avray, 2014). In support of this, the moving and handling team at Northumbria University have worked collaboratively to engage and deliver a mandatory practical session focused on a bariatric patient scenario to prepare pre-registration students for working life. This session also incorporated a multidisciplinary approach, by ensuring an interprofessional teaching team was represented at practical sessions, with the lead facilitator often being of the same discipline as the group of students, and the remaining team members from varying disciplines within the healthcare Faculty.

Method

A simulated practical session was developed, in order to demonstrate safe approaches that students could utilise in clinical practice. This incorporated the use of a weighted, and appropriately sized, bariatric simulation suit, the necessary bariatric moving and handling apparatus and clinical learning environments to increase realism. The aim of the session was to reinforce safe practice, which would ensure patient and staff safety whilst students are participating in clinical placements across the region.

Before delivering this session to students, members of the team undertook a pilot of the teaching session, which was filmed. It was recorded for staff development, but also as it could be used as a teaching resource, and accessed by students via the University's Clinical Skills website "Skills4Practice". This is an invaluable technology enhanced learning portal for healthcare students, enabling access to instructional videos to build on their knowledge, reinforce their practical skills and augment their learning experience.

Results

Staff reported an increased understanding of the complexities of moving bariatric patients and had a greater empathetic knowledge of some of the difficulties these patients experience. This generated discussion in relation to the planning and organisation of specialist equipment, and the extra time and staff required to carry out safe moving and handling techniques. However, one of the most profound findings was the psychological effects of wearing the bariatric suit, which many staff commented on.



"The struggle in attending to personal care, being unable to both see and reach parts of my body became apparent whilst having the suit on."

"From a psychological perspective this experience highlighted how isolated and lonely a person could feel and become. I was sitting in a chair that I couldn't get out of without help and therefore my independence was also affected."

"The involvement of this session has offered me the opportunity to reflect on my own thoughts and ideas I had previously held when meeting and supporting people who are obese. I now have a greater insight and empathy with their situation."

"How a person might think and feel about their appearance was something that I experienced as even with a suit on I did not like looking at myself."

"Whilst wearing the bariatric suit it gave me the opportunity to gain some insight into how hard it must be to be so obese. I was unable to breath, bend down or tie my shoe laces and even go to the toilet. I felt trapped and claustrophobic which made me very depressed where I just wanted to lie on the bed and sleep".

The way forward

A series of small pilot sessions, with senior undergraduate students from across disciplines within the Health and Life Science Faculty will be introduced. Using both the specialised bariatric suit and bariatric equipment, the aim is to ensure students gain a simulated experience of assisting the bariatric patient/client to change position, move from the bed to the wheelchair, and move within the bed. In addition, a small number of students will be encouraged to wear the bariatric suit during the sessions, in order for them to briefly experience the restrictive nature and subsequent potential psychological effects of being obese.

These session will then be evaluated, using focus groups and data will be analysed using thematic analysis. Findings will be examined in order to abstract the strengths and limitations of this pilot, prior to it being develop further and incorporated into undergraduate programmes. The findings may also lead to additional research into the psychological aspects of wearing the bariatric suit and using an interprofessional teaching team to enhance learning and a greater understanding of the multi-disciplinary team working common in the healthcare workplace.

