Using performance and leadership mentors to support students during a simulated pharmacy business module

Vibhu Solanki1, Matthew J Boyd1, Claire Anderson1, Kimberly Sonnex1, Sarah Brydges1 & Simona Ionescu2.

1Division of Pharmacy Practice and Policy, University of Nottingham, UK 2School of Education, University of Nottingham

Objective

To support undergraduate team development with a mentor employed to support and coach groups and individuals to learn, practise and develop their leadership and team working skills as part of a synoptic experiential learning experience drawing on leadership and management skills.

Design and development

Pharmacy Leadership and Management (PLM) is a module which provides an experiential learning simulation drawing on leadership and management skills coupled with clinical problem solving. Teams of six to seven students run their own primary care based pharmacy business competing against each other, based on a successful model currently run by the GIMMICS consortia of universities across Europe. When major organisations introduce new projects or transformation programmes, change management and performance coaches are used to good effect. In introducing a new method of learning, radically different to MPharm years one to three, a decision was made to employ performance coaches to support the students personal and team performance.

Working with the university graduate school, a job description and person specification was developed. Mentors were appointed, using a robust application and interview process. A bespoke leadership and management training programme was co-developed between the Pharmacy and Graduate schools (figure 1). The mentors supported student-led group sessions, coaching them to reflect on performance, develop solutions and change initiatives. The performance mentors were able to monitor the progress of their clients and stimulate interventions to improve their performance. During semester two, mentors increased student observations, hence initiating performance based coaching sessions.

Assessment

The role and perceived benefit of the performance mentors were evaluated via a single mentor focus group exploring their experiences of the role, students and the mentor programme. The interview was carried out by a mentor and masters graduate from the school of education, audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Students views were obtained via an online 82-item questionnaire was sent to all 221 students on the module comprising open and closed questions about their module experiences.

Conclusion

The students valued the role of the performance coaches, even though they did not fully understand the role. The students used the pharmacist qualified mentors as a pseudo-academics, which made the mentors role more difficult. Mentors wanted a more comprehensive understanding of the simulated game before starting the role and greater direction on how to maximize their impact.

A larger study over 48 simulation days, will be conducted from September 2017. Data will be collect using virtual e-learning platforms and mentor blogs, in addition to student mid and end of year evaluations.