



Field Posting – Work Based Learning in Dental Education

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Abstract

Workplace-based learning (WBL) is a vital component of the training and education of healthcare professionals and learning in the workplace enables students to learn knowledge, skills, and aptitudes required in their professional practice. This study aimed to evaluate final year dental students' field posting visit to The Ministry of Health (MOH) facilities to observe and learn how the principles of primary health care are being applied. A cross-sectional survey was carried out for final year students who completed their field posting visit to MOH centers in Malaysia. A pretested and validated questionnaire based on the Likert scale range from 1 - 5 (Scale 1 -highly disagree and scale 5 - highly agree) was distributed to the students. Data collected were analyzed using SPSS software. The mean value range was from (3.38 - 4.26) for all 8 items questions. Overall students agreed that field posting was well organized (70%), enhanced knowledge in health care services provided in MOH (95%), helped to understand future clinical practice in MOH (89.5%), and less than fifty percent agreed that health care services were accessible, available, acceptable and affordable to public (48.8%). The overall students' experience with field posting visit to MOH centers showed a positive attitude and had able to understand the health care facilities provided in MOH, Malaysia.

Keywords: Work Based Learning; Field Posting; Health Care Services

Abbreviations

WBL: Workplace-Based Learning; MOH: Ministry of Health; FP: Field Posting

Introduction

Work Based Learning (WBL) is driven by the impact of changes in demographics, skills demands, technologies, and people's relationships and roles within various institutions and communities. Work based learning is defined by activities and experiences when a student or worker goes to a workplace or works with an employer and does meaningful job tasks that develop his or her skills, knowledge, and readiness for work and support entry or advancement in a particular career field. Transitions from school to work are not as distinct and linear as they once were. Learning is no longer confined to a "front loaded" activity in a formalised, classroom environment [1].

Besides the acquisition of specific and competent skills at the work place enables the student to improve the skills and com-

petence to a critical level through a specific kind of learning [2]. Generally, the WBL method involves the combination of learning in an educational institution and the work place. Various models are used to make the WBL method successful. The focus of WBL also classified into cooperative work, field trips, job shadowing, school-based enterprise, entrepreneur, internship, clinical experiences and youth apprenticeship [3]. In the review of literature, WBL is a form of learning that relates to all fields of work, work-based learning, learning at the work place and learning through working [4]. It is a working experience in which students need to go through a learning process in an institution to gain experience and apply the skills in the related industries according to what is required in an actual working environment [5].

In Penang International Dental College, as part of the Community Dentistry course, final year dental students are required to attend the field posting for one week in Ministry of Health (MOH) Oral health care services so that they can observe and learn how

the principles of primary health care are being applied. Students are divided into small groups and posted in different states of MOH centers in Malaysia. Students are required to give a presentation to the State Dental Director or his/her representative at the end of their visit and these presentations are then submitted to the Community Dentistry department and compiled reports are sent to the Principal Director of the Oral Health Division.

One of the concerns of this field posting is that there has been no evaluation of how much students have learned and the effectiveness of field posting.

The study was conducted to evaluate the final year dental student's effectiveness of field posting visit to the Ministry of Health (MOH) facilities.

Materials and Methods

This is a cross-sectional study conducted on students who have completed their field posting visits. A questionnaire (8 items) was designed based on the previous field posting report with a Likert scale ranged from 1-5, scale 1 -highly disagree to scale 5 is highly agree and also validated by experts. A validated questionnaire is distributed to the final year students who completed their field postings. All participants were informed of the objectives of the study, information on the items in the questionnaire was explained, and participant anonymity and confidentiality were assured. The data through questionnaire is analyzed by using SPSS software.

Results

A total of 39 participants completed the questionnaire, table 1 summarizes mean scores for each question.

The overall response for field posting, it was well organized and briefing on Health care services was easily understood (70%). With regard to knowledge gained, the majority of the students' agreed that field posting helped to enhance their knowledge regarding health care services provided in MOH (95%).

Sr. No.	Question Items	Mean Score
1	Well Organized	3.69
2	Enhance knowledge	4.28
3	Aware about expectations	4.26
4	Duration sufficient	3.69
5	Satisfying experience	4.08
6	Health care services	3.38
7	Dental auxiliaries	3.92
8	Theory to practice	3.97

Table 1: Overall mean scores for 8 items.

The field posting was useful for students what to expect in future clinical practice in MOH and to become aware of what is expected in health care services in Malaysia (89.5%). In regards to the planned duration of FP, 61.6% of students agreed that FP duration was sufficient, but 30.8% were not sure if the duration was sufficient.

Overall students' had a good experience with the field posting visit (84.6%). Less than fifty percent students agree the Health care services were accessible, available, acceptable and affordable to all public (48.8% agree) and 43.6% students were unsure about the health care services provided to the public, few students (7.7%) disagree with the fact that health care services are provided to all. The majority of the students' agreed on the duties and responsibilities of dental auxiliaries appreciate their role in MOH oral health care centers (84.6%). The students were able to relate theoretical knowledge to clinical practice from what they observed and learned during the field posting 79.5% of students agreed to this concept, however, 17.9% of students were not sure and 2.6% disagree that field posting can help to relate theory to clinical practice.

Discussion

Work based learning (WBL) programme has increased its popularity among undergraduate students that provide internship, mentoring and workplace stimulations. The aim is to create connections between the classroom and real-world learning where students apply their classroom knowledge to real-world problems. It also helps students to develop critical skills and soft skills such as conflict resolution, creative problem solving, communication and teamwork [6]. Therefore, field posting visit to MOH facilities was conducted for one week for final year dental students to evaluate their work based learning experience.

Briefing is particularly important, especially for newcomers, to step into a new environment. A simple and clear briefing is required for work base learning or field posting. Among the 39 respondents, the majority of them agree that the briefing given on health care services were well organized and easily understood. It is a good sign that most of the students were satisfied with the briefing given and value about to the field posting.

WBL provides participants with opportunities to contextualize what they learn and build their skills and knowledge. Joseph A. Raeli stated that the workplace is the natural location for learning in which it promotes the workplace as a legitimate and essential learning environment [7]. Based on our study, it showed a positive result on knowledge enhancement after their field posting. Out of 39 students, 23 of them (59%) agreed and 14 of them (35.9%) highly agree that field posting helped to understand the health services in MOH. According to David Major, it is stated that

WBL helped to bring change to the culture and working practices of organizations, thereby improving performance and developing new ways of working. WBL also offered a form of learning that is immediately relevant to professional and working life, and it does not automatically provide the learner with theoretical answers to questions they have not asked, leaving them to work out both the questions and the answers for themselves [8].

A similar study done by Ursula Lucas and Phaik Leng Tan stated that WBL placement provides students with an opportunity to experience a ‘real-life’ professional work environment. It is also seen as providing an opportunity to integrate theory and practice [9]. As stated in MOH, there are 3 main dental auxiliaries in Malaysia, which are dental nurses, dental technologist and dental surgery assistants [10]. Each of them plays a main role in dentistry and their contribution and importance towards dentistry are inevitably important. From the results obtained from our research, 71% of the students agree and 12.8% highly agree concerning for appreciation of the duties and responsibilities of dental auxiliaries. This indeed is a positive result which shows that as a student and a future dentist, we value each of them and know the duties of each dental auxiliary.

The theory part of dentistry is as equally as important as practical part of dentistry. Having a good theoretical knowledge is the foundation of becoming a successful dentist. If a student can correlate theoretical knowledge and observation, it will improve the learning process dramatically and have the ability to solve difficul-

ties they faced with ease. In the thick of 39 students, 80% agreed that they can correlate theoretical knowledge and what they observed and learned at FP. This is a very encouraging result for the teaching staff in our institute and also indicates that the teaching method is effective. There are limitations in this study such as minimal sample size and lack of prior research studies on this topic which affect the construction of the questionnaire.

Conclusion

In conclusion, overall students’ experience with field posting visit to MOH centers showed a positive attitude and ability to understand the health care facilities provided in MOH, Malaysia. Therefore, field posting is one of the types of WBL which can help student to build-up self-confidence to face the real challenge at work in future and also able to correlate the knowledge and practice in dentistry. Thus, the WBL program should be continued and improved to produce a high credibility dentists and prepare for future working life.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest in this study and self-funded.

Questionnaire

No.	Statement	Highly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Highly Agree (5)
1.	The visit was well planned and executed.					
2.	The visit was helpful in gaining knowledge.					
3.	The visit was useful for becoming aware of future clinical requirements.					
4.	The duration of field posting is sufficient.					
5.	Field posting overall is a satisfying experience.					
6	Health care services are made accessible, available, acceptable and affordable.					
7	Understood the role of Dental auxiliaries and their duties in MOH					
8	Able to relate Theory to practice during field posting visit					

Table 2

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