Impact of ‘away from home’ on students’ workplace learning

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This project examined the extent to which social contingency factors affect learning of undergraduate nursing/paramedic and teacher education students sent ‘away’ for workplace learning. Research has mostly concentrated on learning during work hours, virtually ignoring social contingencies. Students imbue social contingencies. These can include: additional expenses, relationships, transportation, accommodation, health, safety, culture, religion, carer, sports and employment commitments. How students’ lived experiences outside the workplace impact on their curricular learning and their coping with additional demands were explored. Survey data (n=244 UG nurses/paramedics + 84 UG teachers) were analysed using SPSS. Two focus groups were also held. Results showed that students’ social contingencies are clearly impacting on workplace learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Universities facilitate workplace learning policies encompassing social contingencies related to an ‘away’ placement.
• Students and their significant others’ personal and health concerns assessed before undertaking extended ‘away’ workplace learning.
• Understand students’ work-home life balance while on placement regarding assignment work.
• Construct repositories of available short-term accommodation, health services, eateries, communication, transport and social activities within communities utilised.
• Offer timely financial incentives enticing students to rural communities.
• Explore social contingencies and student attrition.
• Evaluate students’ lived experiences of their whole practicum, not just the workplace.

Keywords: social contingencies, attrition, undergraduates, nurses, teachers