**Back to reality**

Students in Sheffield are getting a taste of the real world of dentistry as part of a new training scheme. In a new series, Dental Protection’s David Croser explains.

Dentistry students at Sheffield University are benefiting from new hands-on training, thanks to a partnership with NHS dental clinics. For five years now, the University of Sheffield’s School of Clinical Dentistry has worked closely with these local NHS clinics, to give students the chance to gain work experience in an environment that resembles a real general practice.

The scheme has been highly successful and is even expanding, as it continues to form partnerships with those carefully selected high street dental practices with a strong NHS commitment to host their students throughout the year. The University of Sheffield’s second partnership is with The Mount Dental Practice in Hemsworth, Pontefract. This method of training is becoming increasingly popular among many dental schools who are opting to provide students with training in these well-designed practices, rather than the traditional dental hospital setting. This helps students become familiar with general practice by the time they qualify and start VT. Research at the University of Sheffield also shows that these outreach placements benefit the students’ everyday clinical skills. In addition, the experience might also encourage students to consider embarking on NHS careers.

What students think

‘Everyone at the Mount has been encouraging, supportive, and friendly and made us feel at home. They’ve helped us increase our confidence as student dentists as well as making our time here memorable,’ said Fourth-year student, Laura Webster.

Dental student Christopher Ryan has enjoyed his experience so much he didn’t want to leave. ‘I wanted to stay there for another six weeks instead of returning to Sheffield and the Dental School.’ While Adam Kharchi adds: ‘My time here has shown me how the general practice works together with other services to serve the Hemsworth community. The setup at The Mount is amazing and has helped me to focus on people and so improve my dentistry.'

Professor Peter Robinson, Head of the Department of Oral Health and Development at the University of Sheffield, and Director of the Outreach Programme, is pleased with the results. He says: ‘It has taken several years of careful development to reach this stage making it all the more gratifying to see both staff and students pleased with the outcomes.'

Protecting the patients

As part of the programme, Dental students undertake irreversible clinical work on patients during the later stages so all patients must consent to treatment. Even though the dental hospital recognises that students have the necessary skills in dentistry before they are allocated to outreach placements, things can still go wrong from time to time—this is where Dental Protection comes in.

This insurance policy provides indemnity for the whole clinical team and ensures that all the patients are protected just as they would be in any other UK practice where Dental Protection provides indemnity. Academic institutions aim to educate their students about the best standards and techniques making Dental Protection a good choice to indemnify this exciting new way of learning.

A growing trend

The indemnity package provided by Dental Protection for Sheffield Dental School is also used by a number of other schools where undergraduate students undertake outreach training in the general dental practice environment. This scheme has also been extended to courses for dental care professionals—again where outreach training has been introduced. The students, trainees, practice owners, clinical tutors and the school itself are all included within a single package which provides a simple one-stop solution to a potentially complicated mandatory requirement.

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