

CASE STUDY: PEER ASSISTED LEARNING (PAL) PROGRAMME

In 2012 a peer assisted learning (PAL) programme was set up for student dietitians (see appendix 1) at the Royal Liverpool University Hospital (RLUH), which is part of the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust (RLBUHT). This is an in-house training programme which was first run in September 2012 and is student self-directed learning with support from supervising dietitians.

Topping and Ehly (1998) defined peer assisted learning as 'the acquisition of knowledge and skills through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions'. This means adopting a collaborative approach in pairs of students, with one student taking on the role of tutor and the other the role of tutee.

The first three weeks of placement were highlighted as a key time to run this programme, as both students would be on a similar level in regards to completing a dietetic assessment. PAL activities are slotted in around supervised dietetic sessions thereby enabling students to relate what they have witnessed with the dietitian to their peer review sessions.

Key Outcomes

Feedback has been positive from both students and dietitians. To date all the students have found PAL beneficial, allowing them to develop basic skills at ease and not having the pressure of a dietitian beside them. They felt comfortable carrying out tasks and found them helpful and beneficial to learning. However, they felt the programme was too generous with the allocated time frame for completing tasks

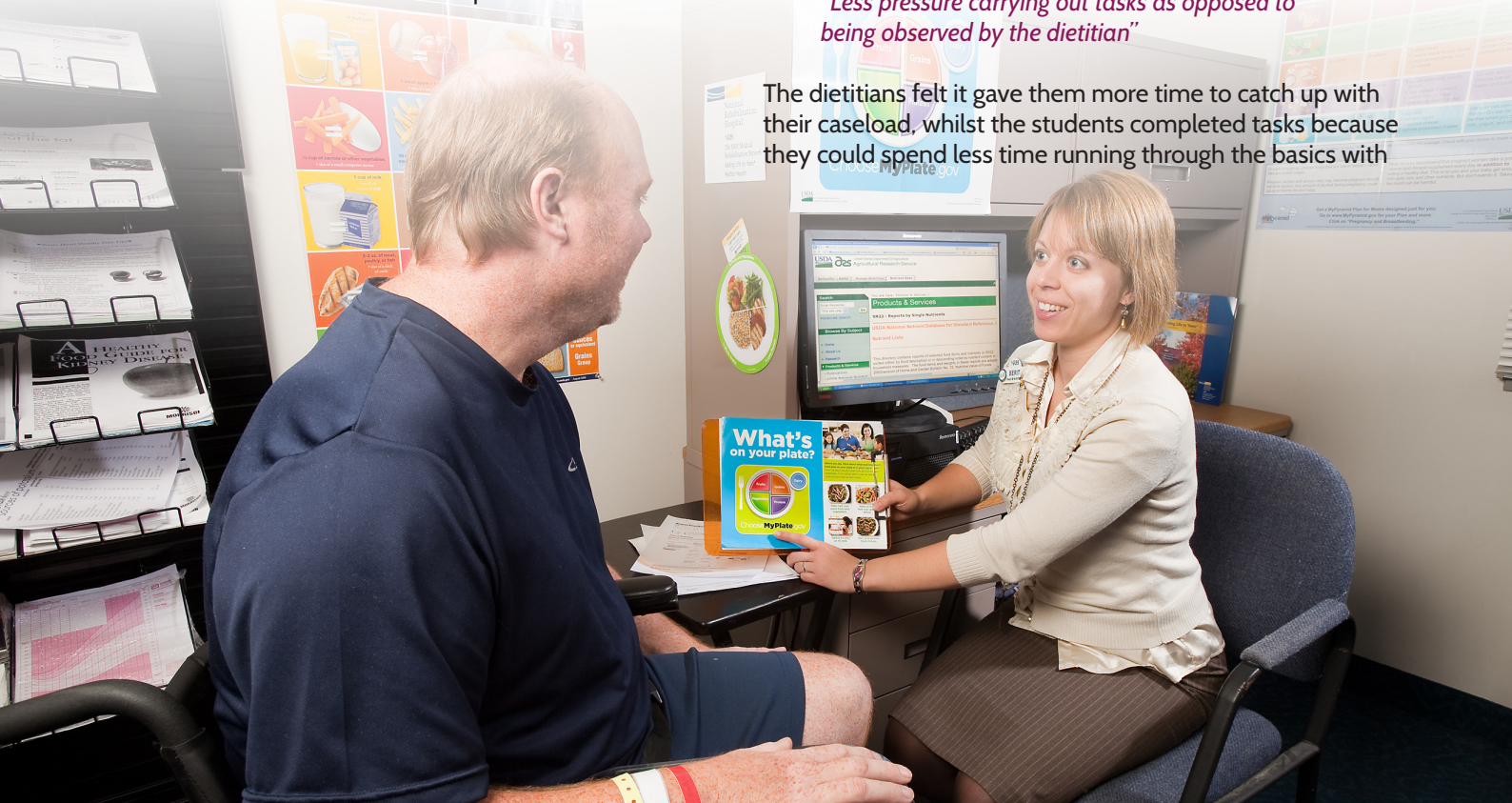
"PAL was very useful in making me familiar with the whole dietetic assessment of a patient. It also equipped us well for starting on the wards"

"Not feeling under pressure with a dietitian beside you allows you to feel comfortable carrying out the tasks and not afraid to ask questions to the other student"

"Overall PAL was very beneficial and allowed me to develop the basic skills at ease"

"Less pressure carrying out tasks as opposed to being observed by the dietitian"

The dietitians felt it gave them more time to catch up with their caseload, whilst the students completed tasks because they could spend less time running through the basics with



the students. For example, case notes, food and fluid charts and the Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool (MUST), which is currently used in the Trust to identify patients at risk of malnutrition.

An official evaluation has not been conducted however verbal feedback indicates that dietitians can see up to four extra patients per day when they do not have to spend so much time with students and that the PAL programme therefore allows each dietitian to see an extra 20 patients.

Background

The Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospital Trust (RLBUHT) is one of the largest and busiest hospital trusts in the North of England seeing almost one million patients every year. It provides services across three hospitals; the Royal Liverpool University Hospital, Broadgreen Hospital and Liverpool University Dental Hospital. It is one of the top 20 teaching trusts in the country with well-established links to both the University of Liverpool and John Moores University. However it is the University of Chester which provides the majority of student dietitians.

Recently the opportunity arose to redevelop the student dietitian training programme following a management restructure. The dietetics team wanted to improve the current programme, to enhance student learning but to also consider the caseload demands of existing staff. Therefore the team discussed forms of best practice within other trusts and their own personal experiences of training students. As a result it was decided that the best approach would be to develop students' clinical skills without the pressure of a dietitian observing them. This also takes the pressure off the dietitians in these early stages of the placement because of their busy case load.

Key Aims

- Enable students to demonstrate a greater independence and build confidence without the pressure of being directly supervised by a qualified dietitian.
- Allow students to find things out independently without relying on the dietitian to show them.
- Build students' confidence when speaking to a patient in front of a peer instead of a dietitian.
- Increase their confidence in using hospital charts independently and identifying the limitations of these.
- Allow students time to calculate nutritional intakes and requirements independently and to start considering an appropriate dietary care plan with a peer, as opposed to a dietitian.

Key Stages of Setup

• Keys components that should be included in the programme were identified i.e. breaking down a full nutritional assessment into bite size chunks

• A workbook was then developed (see Appendix 1) and a evaluation form (see Appendix 2)

• The programme began in September 2012

• Acting on feedback from the students changes continue to be made to the programme where necessary

How It Works

This is an in-house programme which was developed, and is run, entirely by the dietetics team. It works to implement the requirements of the Learning and Development Agreement.

Activities for PAL were developed considering the idea of breaking down a full assessment into bite size tasks and incorporating Chester University student assessment tools; thereby also allowing the student to start collecting evidence for their portfolio.

The PAL programme contains seven activities:

1. ward orientation and identifying ward staff
2. familiarisation with supplement and feed range
3. completion of the Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool (MUST)
4. collecting a patient's history from medical notes
5. obtaining diet histories
6. calculating intakes from food and fluid charts
7. calculating nutritional requirements

At the end of the programme students are asked to fill out an evaluation form (see Appendix 2)

Resources

No funding was required; the only resources needed for setting up the programme was dietetic department time to write the programme and print out the workbooks.

Key Challenges

- This is a new concept for most students and therefore the programme needs to be verbally explained to them by a dietitian before they start
- The students need to be freed up to do their tasks at the same time and therefore this requires co-ordination of their timetables.

Key Learning

Too much time was allowed for the students to complete components of the programme as students completed tasks much faster than anticipated. This was fed back on the evaluation forms and has influenced changes to the programme for future service users.

“For some of the activities I felt we were given too much time”

For more information contact

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Sustainability

For the students PAL is forming the basis of their clinical skills, and for the dietetics department it is another key resource used to train students and help to alleviate some of the pressure of busy clinical caseloads; thus ensuring the programme's sustainability.

Next Steps

The dietetics department will:

- continue to evaluate the programme and make amendments based on service-user feedback
- look at adjusting the timescale for each task
- consider introducing some audit work around record keeping and MUST completion

Supporting Material

The following resources are available as an appendix to this case study:

- Appendix 1 - Peer Assisted Learning Programme
- Appendix 2 - Evaluation Feedback Form