

# Ethnographic reflections in the Emergency Department: Transforming our understanding of how students navigate busy clinical attachments

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The emergency department (ED) is a busy environment where medical students are expected to integrate into a complex, high pressured clinical system within a two-week placement, whilst achieving their learning outcomes. Maximising student efficiency in these spaces, especially in the face of rising student numbers, should be a priority. We set out to understand what students are doing on our clinical attachment in order to understand the needs of students currently and the need for future innovations.

**Methods:** Data was gathered over an 8 week period which encompassed attachments of 30 students at the Royal Infirmary Edinburgh ED. Observational data was collected using an ethnographic approach by an emergency medicine registrar. Due to this familiarity with the ED, staff feedback on student interaction was also obtained and was later formalised with a short survey.

## Results:

Positive placement themes identified:

- students had good learning opportunities
- students were made to feel welcome in the ED
- students felt supported by having a ‘buddy’ for the first two shifts
- staff enjoyed being involved in student education

“It’s actually quite fun”  
- Y6 medical student

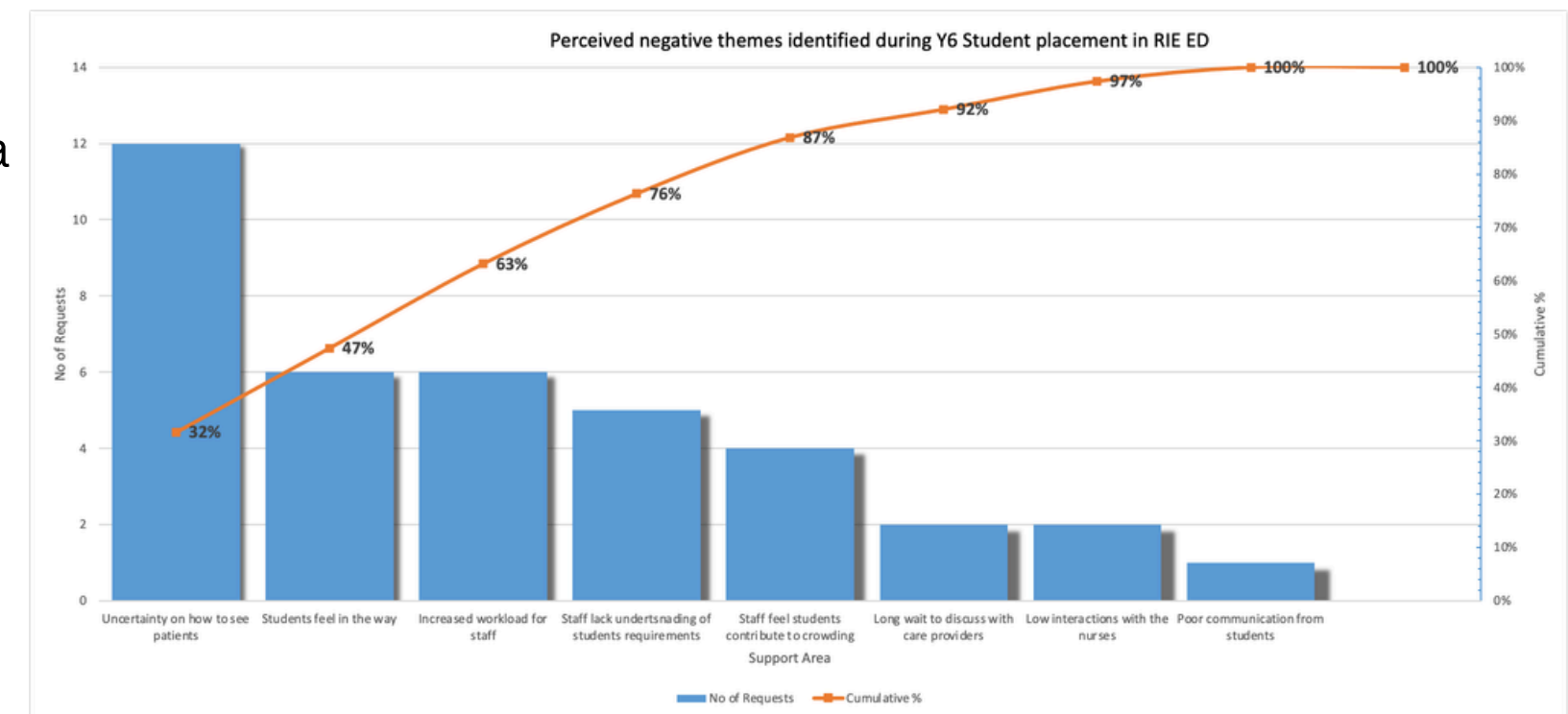


Figure 1: Negative themes pareto chart

The negative themes are identified in Figure 1. Students felt uncertain how to see patients by themselves when left to work more independently and sometimes felt “in the way” in the busy ED. Several students commented that the placement was “very different” to previous clinical attachments in terms of the expectations on them as students and the clinical environment, although many found that this also gave them unique clinical exposure which they found useful.

**Conclusions:** The overwhelming response to the attachment was positive. Examples of the difficulties students face integrating into the clinical environment has given us insight into how students are currently navigating a complex busy placement. The results have given focus for improving the placement, with special attention to the systems we have in place and what can make them more accessible for students.