

Beyond the Classroom: What Pharmacy Students Learn from Experiential Placements in Hospice Care

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Background

Specialist palliative care is a complex clinical area requiring knowledge of palliative medicines, symptom control, communication, ethics, and multidisciplinary working. Undergraduate pharmacy curricula often provide limited exposure to real-world palliative care practice.

Experiential learning placements help bridge this gap by allowing students to develop their knowledge in a real life setting. Communication is a main focus throughout the placement, re-iterating to students the importance of different techniques to ensure excellent communication. Through patient contact in different environments, students can appreciate the impact of setting on communication and the presentation of the patient.

By working with various members of the multidisciplinary (MDT) team students recognise the role of the pharmacist and how their expertise fits into the wider care of the palliative patient.

This project aimed to evaluate the impact of a hospice-based experiential learning placement on undergraduate pharmacy students:

- Pharmacological knowledge in palliative care
- Understanding of the pharmacist's role within specialist palliative care
- Awareness of the wider multidisciplinary team (MDT) across different patient settings

Methods

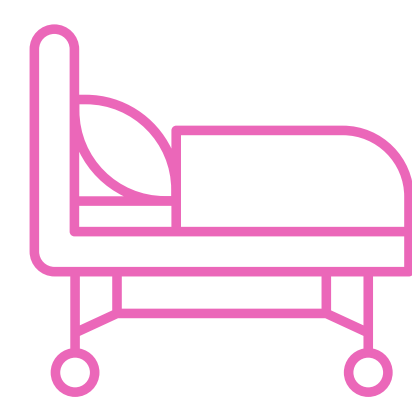
Undergraduate pharmacy students undertook a two-week placement within a hospice specialist palliative care environment. Students completed:



- A pre-placement questionnaire assessing baseline knowledge and understanding
- A post-placement questionnaire following the placement

Students were also invited to provide qualitative reflections describing their experience. Changes in responses between pre- and post-placement questionnaires were analysed to evaluate the impact of the placement.

Placement Structure



In-Patient Unit

- Daily medical handover
- Teaching ward rounds
- Evidence based clinical decision-making
- Medication review and deprescribing
- Unlicensed and off label medicines use
- Opioid conversion, CSCI medicines compatibility



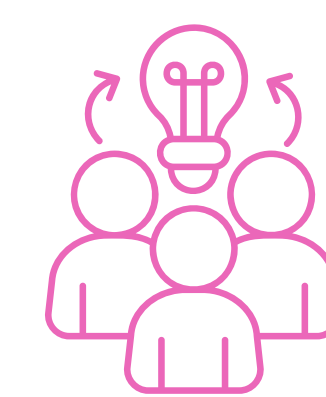
Community

- Complexities of community palliative care and service coordination
- Role of the community pharmacist in palliative care
- Potential impact of poor community pharmacy care on patients and family
- Symptom management in the home environment



Living Well Service

- Communication with patients being cared for in the community
- Patient contact in a relaxed, non clinical environment
- Understanding the impact of hospice care on the patient journey



Multi Disciplinary Working

- Engagement with other MDT professionals, supporting learning around:
- Non-pharmacological symptom management
 - Communication with patients and families
 - Ethical decision making
 - Advance care planning and consent

Results

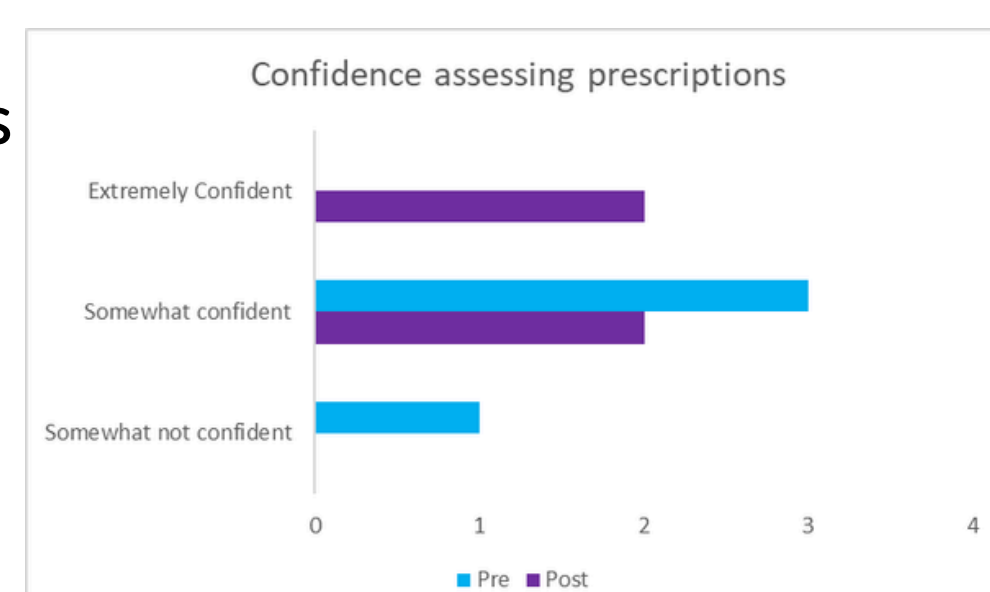
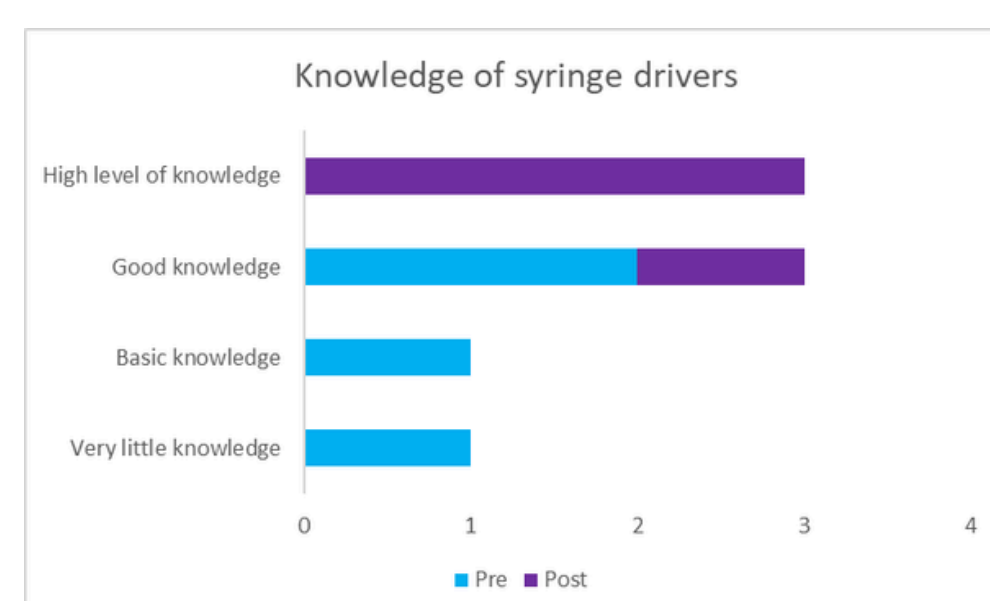
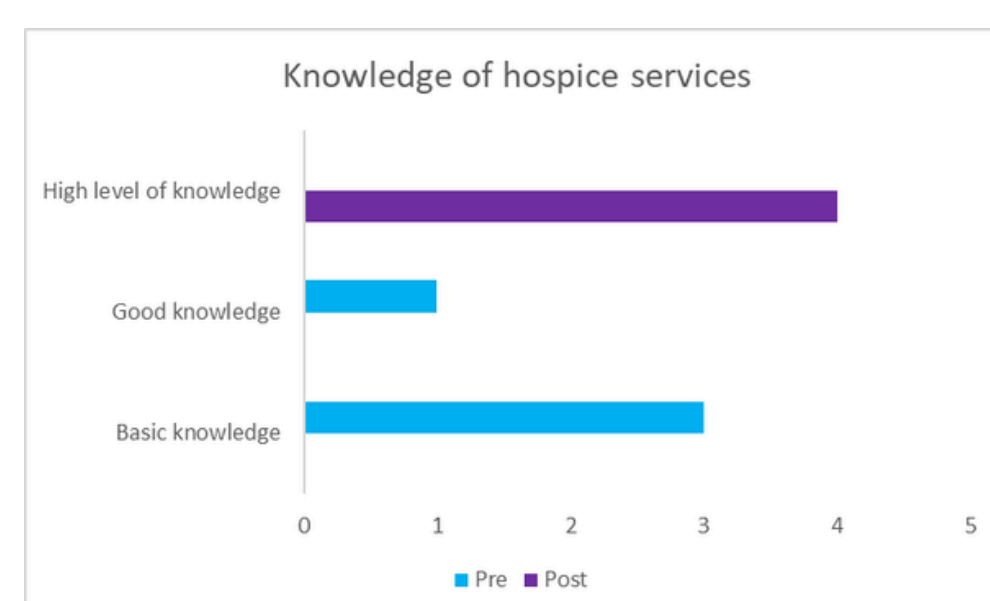
Areas with the greatest knowledge gains:

- ✓ Better understanding of the choice of opioids available to prescribe
- ✓ Improved understanding of managing loss of swallow
- ✓ Greater understanding of palliative care as a clinical specialty
- ✓ Better understanding of medicines rationalisation

★ 100% of students reached a high level of knowledge of hospice services

★ All students demonstrated improved knowledge across key areas of palliative care following the placement.

★ Recognised by NES as making a valuable contribution to enhancing experiential learning placements March 2026



How Did Students Feel About Their Placement?



“

It has definitely changed my practice, a patient is not just a name on a paper, they have a family, a personal life and hobbies.

”

“

I got to practice opioid calculations through cases which helped massively in my understanding of what opioid to choose and what to dose it at.

Not only opioids, but I gained a better understanding of other commonly used palliative care medicines and even reinforcement of the use of other medication.

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Conclusion

A two-week hospice based specialist palliative care undergraduate pharmacy student experiential learning placement demonstrated a positive impact on pharmacy undergraduate overall understanding of palliative care and the role of pharmacy within the specialist area.