Breeding Flight Nurses: The value of student nurse/midwife placements in an aeromedical organisation

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Background

> Difficulty finding suitably qualified candidates for flight nurse positions.

> Nursing and midwifery independent disciplines

> Expose students to aeromedical nursing as a valid career

> Adhoc student initiated placements prior to 2013.

> Dec 2012 – Identified “need to breed”

> Targeted BN/BM degrees – currently none offered in NSW

> Several Placements S1 2013

> Varied University (Originally Sydney Uni’s not interested)
> NSW Air Ambulance – Sydney Airport
> Fixed Wing Operations Only
> 5 fixed wing aircraft – Mixed kingair
> Roughly 6000 patients moved a year
> Staffed by 34 RN/RM Flight Nurses

> 11 FTE CNSII Positions

> Several CNS I positions

> Supported by SFN and FNE

> Lifespan approach to nursing care.
Student Selection, Placement Structure and Orientation Process

> Agreements with Universities – length and subject

> Students underwent various merit selection processes dictated by the university

> Given orientation work book and self directed learning package to work through on Day One

> Preceptor identified and mutual objectives and university assessment requirements negotiated

> Orientated Day One to airside safety, environment and role.

> Mid Placement reviews and assessments negotiated
Feedback Activity
Literature Review

> Limited research on flight nurses and students

> Large amount of midwifery students experiences but mainly focusing on staff perceptions

> Mixed results focused on pre-placement anxiety and nurses and midwives ‘eating their young’ a common theme
Methodology

- Post clinical placement online survey sent to students that attended a clinical placement at Air Ambulance via email

- Covering placements from 2011 – End of S1 2013

- Total of 10 students identified as eligible. 7 interstate, 1 rural NSW, 2 Sydney based

- Combination of question types and free text to encourage the student to identify personal experiences

- Thematic Analysis of student feedback
Nursing and Midwifery Student's experience of clinical placements with Flight Nurses at NSW Air Ambulance

Pre Placement

To help us better understand your needs and concerns prior to your placement please answer the following questions. The more information you give us the better we can help your nursing and midwifery peers in the future.

1. Why did you choose NSW Air Ambulance as a preferred clinical placement?

2. Did you have a pre-existing interest in Flight Nursing as a career option?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No
   - [ ] I'd never heard of flight nursing before

3. What Unit of study was this placement for?

4. Did you receive enough pre-placement information in a timely manner?
Response Rate and Demographics

> Response Rate 100% (n=10)

> Aged 21 – 39

> 80% Female and 20% Male Students

> 70% BN/BM degree 30% BN degree

> 30% have completed other undergraduate degrees

> 50% nursing is a career change

> 30% currently working in healthcare

> No scholarships or funding to undertake placement
Q.2 – Did you have a pre existing interest in flight nursing as a career option?

“I’d never heard of flight nursing before” – Student
Q.1 Why did you choose NSW Air Ambulance as a preferred clinical placement?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous interest in flight nursing /career goal</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique Clinical Experience</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking a challenging clinical placement</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantage on resume</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of opportunity in other states</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirm interest in flight nursing</td>
<td>10%</td>
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Unit of Study

- Critical Care: 40%
- Med/Surg: 30%
- Rural & Remote: 20%
- Consolidating Practice: 10%
Pre Placement Preparation

> 90% felt adequately prepared with pre placement contact with NSW AA

> 90% preferred email contact, 50% Txt and 60% telephone

> “I didn’t receive any information about the placement until I sent an email the wk (sic) prior…May have been helpful to receive some kind of example of what a day in the life of a flight nurse involves as I had no idea about any of it and sometimes felt confused” – Student
> “Of all my placements information from air ambulance was outstanding” – Student

> “The week before my placement I received a phone call from my preceptor…that phone call made me feel welcome into the team” - Student

> “Booklet given via email a week prior would be great” – Student
Pre Placement Anxiety

Common Themes

- Anxious about flying in a small aircraft
- Unsure of role and expectations
  
  “I did not want to be viewed as a uni student just getting through my subjects” – Student

- Willingness to participate but unsure of how this will come about
  
  “Uncertain about my role/how much participation I would get” – Student

- Ability to put theory into practice
- Lack of knowledge and skills in such an advanced clinical area
Q.7. On your clinical placement, do you feel that your clinical objectives were met?

> “being inexperienced in critical care I felt I didn’t get to truly understand everything that happened” – Student
Challenges

Common Themes Identified

- Acuity, variety and uncertainty of patients
- Exhaustion
- Confined space and aircraft environment
- Volume of skills and knowledge required

“Being able to think about all the things that could go wrong on a flight and testing my knowledge was challenging” – Student

“Feeling physically drained at the end of each day (even more so than regular nursing!). Simply because I was not conditioned to full time work, and the amount of time spent in the air.” - Student
Negatives

> 80% say they had no negative experiences!

> “I only had 2 weeks there, wish it had been longer!” – Student

> “…although the large amount of time on the ground made me feel a little useless.” – Student

> “Even days that I did not leave the base were productive and I left feeling that I had taken something away with me” – Student
Rewards

Common Themes

- Working with a very experienced RN/RM and having time to learn, talk, reflect on care during downtimes or empty sectors
- Feeling part of a team
- Feeling welcomed, valued and supported
- Joy of flying and travel
- Variety of clinical cohort
- Acquiring and applying knowledge and skills
- Patients and making a difference
After placement interest

> 60% want to go into critical care areas

“Yes, decided to keep up my nursing” – Student

“I thought I'd like to do midwifery until now…” (!) – Student
Q.14 Are you now considering a career in flight nursing?
Findings and Lessons Learned
Summary of findings

> Doing a pretty good job
> Breeding program seems successful so far
> Pre placement anxieties consistent with literature – identified small aircraft issues
> Overall a positive, supporting learning environment is achieved
> Students feel valued and part of a team
> Minimal negative experiences
> Value working with an experienced RN/RM
> Value time that empty sectors/downtime provides compared to busy hospital environments
Lessons Learned/Limitations

> Only 10 students surveyed

> Relatively new concept to NSW AA to have student placements

> Pre placement provision of information of paramount importance – now email induction booklet to students

> ? Billeting opportunities as suggested by students
Ambulance Service of New South Wales

The Future
> Hopefully created interest in flight nursing as a career option

> Hopefully prepared candidates for future FN positions

> Staff attitudes survey to having students placed in the organisation

> Follow up in 2 years to see students progression
So, Have we managed to breed new flight nurses?
Appears we have had a successful conception and must await gestation

“these were the best group of people I have ever worked with. I look forward to hopefully working with them again in the future!”

“Best four weeks of my nursing career so far!”

“It has definitely opened up my eyes to a future in flight nursing and now have my eyes set on trying to get ED or ICU experience so that one day I may be able to work as a flight nurse”

“Seeing the work Air Ambulance does reignited my love for nursing and solidified my belief that I want to be a flight nurse”
“My placement has cemented my desire to pursue flight nursing as a career. I has (sic) the chance to sit down and discuss possible pathways to flight nursing with flight nurses and the senior flight nurse. This will no doubt influence the decisions I make throughout my career, as I make the journey toward a career in flight nursing.”

“I would like to say that I have never been on a placement where I felt more welcome, more valued as a member of the team and a developing nurse/midwife. It was a truly fantastic experience that I can thoroughly recommend to any student .... and it has made me rethink my career options. ..I'm now seeking critical care experience after graduation so that maybe, one day, I might have the opportunity to become a flight nurse!!”
Questions?

“50% off Krispy Kreme Donuts are dangerous” Student - Potential bariatric client?