

Work Experience Programs in NSW Public Health System (Guidelines for Provision of)

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**GUIDELINES FOR THE PROVISION OF WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS
IN THE NSW PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM**

The attached guidelines are provided to assist Health Services develop a range of work experience programs for school students.

These have been developed as a result of the recent review of nursing career promotional material. Focus groups conducted with school students and career advisers, identified work experience as one of the most important activities influencing students in their choice of career.

This circular should be read in conjunction with Circular 97/46 issued 18 April 1997 titled "Student Training and Rights of Patients.

Participation in work experience programs has advantages for both the health sector and student. These programs raise awareness of the variety of careers available in the health care industry and awareness of the organisation of the system delivering care.

There are distinct advantages for students who are exposed to day-to-day work management in realistic environments. They observe the traits and qualities necessary for a variety of careers and, importantly, gain insight into roles they may consider for the future. The aim of the experience is to provide students with information to make an informed and appropriate decision about their future career.

I encourage you to support the provision of a variety of work experience programs and actively contribute to the recruitment of tomorrow's health worker.

Michael Reid
Director-General

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GUIDELINES FOR THE PROVISION OF WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS IN THE NSW PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM

GENERAL INFORMATION RELATING TO WORK EXPERIENCE

Work experience exposes students to a variety of roles within the health care industry. It aims to assist students in making an informed decision about their available options and preferred career choice.

Work experience helps dispel myths about marketed stereotypes and provides insight into the traits and qualities expected of various categories of staff. It provides students with an insight into the diversity of health occupations and, regardless of the student's ultimate career choice, it should be a positive experience, raising an awareness and knowledge of the health system and those staff working in all areas of the service.

ADVANTAGES FOR THE EMPLOYER

Work experience

- assists in building a positive attitude to the industry by the community;
- broadens the recruitment network through community education;
- assists in stabilising the workforce, as students make well-informed choices.

ADVANTAGES FOR THE STUDENT

Work experience

- provides experience of responsibilities in an adult role within the work place;
- increases the understanding of the relevance of school studies in relation to the requirements of work;
- provides first-hand knowledge of the work environment;
- allows the student to specifically investigate their career choice in the actual work place.

WORK EXPERIENCE AND THE RIGHTS OF PATIENTS

All New South Wales public health system services must have a Student Training and Patient Rights policy. This policy should include the need for the employer to advise work experience students of their responsibility to maintain patient confidentiality and abide by the Information Privacy and Code of Conduct (May 1996).

There are a number of methods used by various institutions in communicating the appropriate behaviour of work experience students. Some of these are student guidelines, identification badges and patient brochures explaining the role of students.

PRINCIPLES TO BE ENCOMPASSED IN LOCAL POLICIES

If the work experience involves patient care areas the health professional must seek the client's/patient's permission for the work experience student to observe while they (the health professional) interact and deliver care.

Any patient may refuse to have a work experience student observe their treatment, regardless of whether the activity is part, or additional to, the normal requirements of care.

Work experience students should understand the patient information and consent process, but may only participate in the process as an observer.

Both client's/patient's and the work experience student must be treated with respect and should not be placed in situations which may cause them harm, discomfort or unease.

ESTABLISHMENT AND ORGANISATION OF A WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

In general, approval to conduct work experience is sought from the management of your organisation. In some instances, the work experience program may be co-ordinated by a Staff Development/Training Unit, while the supervision of students may be organised at the local or unit level. In other instances, one person may be responsible for the entire program.

Regardless of the organisation, it is essential to nominate a co-ordinator who can liaise with both the school careers adviser or student and the staff.

There should be open lines of communication between the schools involved;

The school careers advisers are usually the contacts;

A formal schedule of activities should be planned and a flexible timetable devised for each day or week so that both students and staff are prepared;

Students should be made aware of fire and emergency procedures.

A work experience program should be flexible and adjusted to meet the workload demands of the staff member supervising the student. From the student perspective, it should be adaptable, responsive to individual needs and, where possible, allow for regular explanation of processes. It is acknowledged that work experience programs are, at times, limited by the workload of staff and the degree of complexity of that work.

Use of teaching tools (eg, work experience booklets) will foster a positive experience for both the student and staff members involved.

During the work experience program, the work place becomes an extension of the classroom. Work experience has relevance for students of all ability levels.

Students usually spend 1 – 2 weeks with an employer or part of a week spread over several weeks. For some work experience students, this may involve attendance at the work place as well as at a university or TAFE campus.

NSW Health Department Circular 97/80, *Procedures for Recruitment and Employment of Staff and Other Persons – Vetting and Management of Allegations and Improper Conduct*, does not relate to secondary school students participating in work experience programs.

CONFIDENTIALITY

As mentioned previously, it is important that students be made aware of their obligations under the Information Privacy and Code of Conduct (May 1996).

In programs that involve patient care areas this issue can be reinforced with the students by asking them to sign a form covering the protection of privacy and confidentiality. It is also advisable to send this form to the student with the letter of acceptance, to be returned on day one of the program.

PRACTICAL WAYS TO ENHANCE THE PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS

Consider all areas of the hospital where activities or observational visits may be appropriate. For example, a work experience student who has selected nursing may spend time in the ambulatory care setting as well as the hospital facility.

Other tips include:

Providing a wide range of opportunities for the student to observe.

Ensure students are aware of their responsibilities with regards to safety, dress and punctuality.

Ensure that the student has refreshment breaks and is able to locate the cafeteria, coffee shop, lunch room, etc. Students should be instructed to notify their supervisor of their absences from the work area and report in once they have returned.

Make sure students are aware of situations which may limit the time staff can spend with them.

- Be aware of the student's limited experience. Choose activities that are appropriate for the student.

In patient care areas:

Ask the patient's permission and prepare the student for what they will see, how they should react and their responsibility in regards to confidentiality and patient privacy.

Make sure that students are aware of the requirements for patient safety – bedrails, walking frames, etc.

ELIGIBILITY OF STUDENTS FOR WORK EXPERIENCE

Students aged 14 and over are eligible for work experience, however it should be noted that students under 15 years cannot participate in a work place learning activity outside the hours of 7am and 6pm.

INSURANCE AND INDEMNITY

Details of insurance and indemnity provisions for government school students participating in workplace learning programs is contained in *An Employer's Guide to Workplace Learning*, available from

The State Workplace Co-ordinator
 Vocational Learning Unit
 Curriculum Support Directorate, NSW
 NSW Department of Education and Training
 Private Bag 3
 Smalls Road
 RYDE NSW 2112
 Telephone (02) 9886 7552

SETTING UP A WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

The process involved in setting up a work experience program will involve:

Planning

- Suitable dates and duration for the organisation and school;
- Determination of the number of students;
- Areas to be used for placements;
- Access to videos, literature and other teaching tools;
- Appropriate activities and observations for students.

Organisation

- Overall management of the program;
- Local level supervision;
- Consultation with staff involved in direct supervision of the student;
- Formulation of a flexible timetable;
- Promotion of the program to schools;
- Process for application.

3. Processing Applications and Requests

- Provide your own application form for the students to complete;
- Consider only written applications;
- If you have to refuse a placement, send a polite letter;
- Compile a standard letter of acceptance confirming the dates, starting time, dress requirements and name of the place and person the student should report to on the first day.

Implementation

- Introductory session;

Issuing of name badges;
Introduction to local unit and direct supervisor.

Evaluation

The aim of the debriefing and evaluation is to obtain the opinion of the student and participating staff on the effectiveness of the program so that it can be continuously improved.

Feedback from the student should be provided to the staff who were involved in actually supervising the student.

Debriefing of students;
Student questionnaire;
Debriefing of supervising staff;
Staff questionnaire;
Report to schools.