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Title: Infection Control: Are We Preparing Our Workforce?

PURPOSE: Learning within the clinical setting is deemed pivotal to the development of tomorrow's practitioners. However, previous research has suggested that education within the clinical setting may have resulted in a reduced understanding of procedures relating to infection control.

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of clinical placement experience upon students' understanding of infection control procedures within a healthcare context.

METHODS: First year undergraduate radiographers (2008-09 cohort) were invited to participate in the study (n=58). Data were gathered using questionnaires at two time-points, prior to and immediately following a four-month clinical placement. Response rates of 100% (n=59) and 92% (n=54) respectively were achieved.

RESULTS: Improvements were evidenced in the respondents' knowledge of infection control procedures across all aspects of infection control (hand hygiene, protective clothing, correct use and disposal of sharps). For example, the number of students correctly identifying when and how to wash their hands improved by 150% and 109% respectively. The percentage of correct responses decreased in relation to the duration of hand-rubbing with alcohol gel (students typically over-estimated the amount of time needed) and hand-hygiene when using sharps. However it should be noted that the prime focus of the placement was on areas where sharps were not in routine use.

CONCLUSION: The study's findings demonstrate the important role that placement learning has in consolidating students' understanding of infection control procedures in the clinical context.

ETHICS: Ethical approval was granted by the School of Physics Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of data collection.

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