

A student's perspective

In 2015, a new model of pharmacy education was introduced and pharmacy students now undertake a fully-integrated programme. This programme includes placements in a breadth of practice settings throughout the five years of pharmacy education. Providing early and dispersed practical experience helps students to contextualise the theory they learn in their School of Pharmacy and provides them with the skills necessary to meet the demands of the future healthcare environment. APPEL (Affiliation for Pharmacy Practice Experiential Learning) is a unique collaboration between University College Cork (UCC), the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) and Trinity College Dublin (TCD). It was established to manage, centralise and streamline the experiential learning placements of the three Schools of Pharmacy in Ireland.

In December's Irish Pharmacist, Shane Byrnes of Hickey's Pharmacy in Ballincollig described his experience as one of the first supervisors to facilitate an APPEL placement in the new integrated pharmacy programme. This month, Claire O'Sullivan, currently a third-year student in UCC, shares her perspective on her placement with Shane in Hickey's, Ballincollig.

What did you enjoy about your second-year practice placement?

I enjoyed spending two full weeks in Hickey's Pharmacy in Ballincollig, where I spent most of my time in the dispensary. This meant that I could follow up on prescriptions from the previous day. I got to see every part of the pharmacy, including being out at the counter. I have previously worked in another pharmacy, so it was interesting to see the differences in the Hickey's Pharmacy. The technicians really helped me fit in. They really made the experience for me and they guided me really well. They also had a number of locums working in the pharmacy, which gave me the opportunity to work with a few different pharmacists and allowed me to gain their insights and opinions.

My supervisor shared his experience in different types of pharmacies, eg, explaining what it was like to work in a rural pharmacy compared to an urban pharmacy. I encountered new scenarios, eg, the Health Amendment Act scheme, which the pharmacist explained to me. I saw how things were ordered.

They kept me involved in everything. As I had experience with the dispensing software, they allowed me to dispense, while supervised, which allowed me to see the whole process. They kept me up to date with all the prescriptions that I was involved in. I also got experience in how to complete nursing home prescriptions. As it was in a shopping centre, there were a lot more antibiotics, which meant I got experience with doses, what types of antibiotics, age groups, etc. They were a really nice team.

How did you prepare for your practice placement?

Before my placement started, I asked more questions at the pharmacy where I have a job to see what I could apply to my placement. I went over my pharmacy practice notes from college, in case I was asked to go out onto the counter. I wanted to make sure I was up-to-date as much as possible. It allowed me to realise what I know and what I should ask questions about or would need help with. The first day, I was out at the counter and I knew the eye was an area I wasn't comfortable with.

I asked for assistance. The manager and my supervisor both explained about the different products that were available on the market. Also, the manager provided some leaflets they use for training and some on vitamins and minerals. Hickey's have a team meeting every morning and the staff would go through one OTC product. The continued professional development



Claire O'Sullivan

of all Hickey's Pharmacy staff is encouraged; the pharmacist would come down and go through a particular topic. Back pain was the topic of the month during my placement. Then each staff member would go through different products on the market, what to say to a patient when offering advice and when to ask for the pharmacist for advice. They would also do a plan for the day and assign roles for the day.

I called into the pharmacy before my placement started. Shane, the pharmacist who supervised my placement, showed me around the pharmacy, where I would put my belongings, where to come on the first day and where I could have lunch. I also got a good notebook for the placement and printed off my notes from our online workbook, so I could see what questions I needed to ask and what activities I needed to complete. I also made sure I had professional dress and my name-badge ready well in advance of starting my placement. I didn't want to be stressed the first morning of my placement.

Now that you have gone through your first student practice placement, how would you prepare for your next placement?

My preparation would depend on the practice setting in which I was going to be placed. I am keen to go into hospital or the regulatory affairs area for my next placement and would tailor my preparation to these settings. I feel like I would be given more responsibility compared to the two-week placement, as I will be that much further on in my course, so I want to be well prepared for that placement well in advance.

What are your top tips for other students for a successful student placement?

Ask as many questions as you can. Learn as much as you can from your supervisor's expertise, as they are there to help you. If you see products on the shelf, ask your supervisor as many questions as you can think of.

Go home every evening and reflect on what you did and what questions you could ask the next day and see what you could find out the next day to learn a little bit more. There's no point not thinking about it, as you won't learn anything from that or gain anything from the experience.

Ask the pharmacists about their education/career path, how they got there, the different routes and points of views, what to watch out for, etc.

Learn from everyone in the shop, OTC counter, manager, pharmacist, etc. The company I was placed

with give really good training to their OTC staff, so they were able to teach me a lot about OTC medications. This was great, as I could see it from their point of view, as they are often the first encounter with the patient, as the pharmacist would come in at a later stage, so it was great to see what advice they had for me. At this early stage, I really do need to hone in my skills for OTC because they are so important.

Enjoy the experience and take in as much information as possible.

Keep up to date with the learning activities. Write down everything you did, see what you learnt from it and what you could take forward for your next placement or your next job.

It is a great opportunity to practice what you learn in university. You are practising your skills with patients that are actually experiencing the symptoms and not pretending with your friends or lecturers.

Take a notepad with you at all times — write down everything. Listen out for little hints and tips from the pharmacist, eg, I learned about the National Medicines Information Centre bulletin.

Have you any other feedback/suggestions which you would like to share?

- Really enjoy the placement.
- Take in as much as you can.
- Don't just stand back — ask to try things.
- Be honest about how much or how little you know. Don't be embarrassed; ask people to explain about something you don't know.
- Make sure you are on time and prepared every morning.
- Make sure you have contacted your supervisor well in advance of your placement.
- Ask questions and don't worry about how silly or basic you may think it is.
- Observe and take in as much information as possible.
- It was interesting to work in a pharmacy as a student on placement rather than a staff member.
- I really like the FAQ section on the APPEL website.

I'm now very excited about where I will go for my year-four placement. I am very keen to get an industry role or emerging practice placement. I want to take full advantage of this opportunity.