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Editorial Title: Long arm practice supervision for physiotherapy learners

Keywords: Long arm practice supervision, indirect supervision, non-traditional placements, care homes, social care, physiotherapy learners

Recent changes to pre-registration education and issues in placement capacity [1] have led to an interest in, and the use of, social care settings as a learning environment for physiotherapy programmes. At the same time Skills for Care [2] have published a new workforce strategy highlighting the need for new, different roles and skills of the social care workforce to meet the changing needs of the sector. This change in direction is further supported by the Chief Medical Officer [3] who recommends care organisations focus on physical activity to preserve the health of the populations in which they serve. In response, some organisations have commenced formal physiotherapy provision into social care settings with clinics [4], referral pathways [5] and postural assessment tools [6]. However, to truly embrace this changing landscape and facilitate physiotherapy placements within the sector, a new way of supervising and assessing learners is required.

Physiotherapy placements in social care are emerging from small, funded feasibility studies and projects. The aims of such placements are to increase placement capacity [7, 8, 9], understand the potential future of physiotherapy in the sector [10], and increase skills such as leadership and autonomous practice of learners in readiness for registration [7, 8, 9, 10]. Placements are either uni or interprofessional, spanning 5 to 7 weeks in length. For example, in 2022, Bournemouth University piloted a care home placement with 4 final year physiotherapy learners in two care homes [7]. Whilst in Greater Manchester 14 physiotherapy learners were placed across 5 care homes during an interprofessional student training experience [8, 9]. The University of Northampton however, placed 4 physiotherapy learners in 2 residential homes [10]. Across the three studies the physiotherapy learners worked together in teams to address the needs of residents in their care. Objectives for the

learners whilst on placement were to either to set up a physiotherapy service and complete a focused project [7], collaboratively address person centred goals of residents [8, 9] or increase physical activity [10]. All demonstrated a positive impact on the learners, care home staff and residents; with changes to practice, implementation of physical activities, provision of new equipment and falls reduction. The experience influenced learners' academic assessments, and two learners were nominated for awards.

To facilitate such placements, a different model of supervision called long arm practice supervision (LAPS) is required. LAPS is not new; evidence and experience from other regulated professions such as Occupational Therapy (OT) and Social Work (SW) [11] have included placements which require a LAPS for many years and is supported by the professional bodies [12, 13].

NHS Employers [14] define LAPS as a model of placement supervision consisting of a supervisor who is a registered physiotherapist but is based at a distance from the learning environment and is available to support the learner(s) as required. Learner(s) receive the vital support and guidance to meet their learning objectives without the LAPS being physically present day to day. Dependent on those involved in the placement, support and advice for learners are provided through a mix of face-to-face meetings and distance communication.

To meet regulatory body requirements [15] and for the learner to be able to understand what is required to pass a placement experience, the learning objectives need to be clearly defined and agreed from the start. This will vary depending on the level of study and the placement setting. The LAPS and the learner will agree these objectives and assess them in line with the Common Placement Assessment Form (CPAF) documentation. The CPAF has been developed in such a way to enable all physiotherapy learners to be assessed in a standardised way for all placement settings.

LAPS can take place in different formats either as part of a 'split placement' where the learner(s) are placed with their educator within a physiotherapy team for part of the week and the rest of the week in the LAPS learning environment; or full time in the LAPS learning environment. Project work or participation in an interprofessional scheme may also be included.

To ensure the model works effectively, clinicians must have knowledge of, the LAPS placement setting, the learner's scope of practice, personal objectives, and the assessment criteria. The clinical educator also needs to establish a working relationship with the Day to Day supervisor to agree lines of communication, meeting dates, and identify opportunities for the learner to develop and demonstrate their skills and knowledge. This may differ to traditional placements.

To manage expectations and reduce learner's anxieties, Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) should include information about LAPS opportunities in placement preparation materials. Effective communication from clinical educators both before and during the placement will help the learners to engage fully and understand the additional role of their Day to Day Supervisor. Information on the opportunities LAPS placements offer learners such as demonstrating leadership and communication skills, establishing therapeutic relationships skills, engaging with research, collaborating with the MDT, and use of evidence-based interventions should be highlighted.

Recent scoping activity of the Allied Health Professions (AHP) workforce in Greater Manchester (GM) has identified the need to raise the profile of such roles within social care and increase access to placements for learners [16]. LAPS supports expansion and access to such non-traditional and under-utilised physiotherapy placements with positive outcomes [17, 7, 8, 9, 10]. However, planning and clear guidance to develop such provision is required.

To facilitate further developments and increase success, partnership with professional bodies and practice organisations are essential. Inclusion of LAPS in professional standards,

robust educator preparation and development, will raise confidence and engage the profession in supporting this model. Within GM, a project is in progress to identify types of long arm supervision models and the funding for sustainability [18]. Pilots of these models need to be completed and evaluated to ensure development of sustainable and safe practice-based learning.

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