

HEALTHCARE STUDENTS

Covid-19: safety, health and wellbeing of students and staff webinar series

This briefing includes recommendations, case studies and resources for universities, sector bodies, regulators and government to ensure healthcare students are fully supported during the Covid-19 pandemic. The briefing is part of a series informed by UUK's Covid-19: safety, health and wellbeing of students and staff webinar series.

■ KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **The Covid-19 pandemic has been a challenging time for healthcare students** who are concerned for both their studies and their placements. Healthcare students were concerned about the pressures of joining the frontline during the pandemic – for many this meant studying without supernumerary status. Healthcare students were concerned about how they would cope with the emotional trauma and stress of being on the frontline at a crucial time for the NHS.
- **Universities are mindful that some healthcare students were not able to undertake placements at this time**, for example those that were shielding or had vulnerable family members. Terminology such as ‘opting out’ of supporting the NHS has made some students feel a sense of guilt for not being able to continue their studies. It is important to consider these healthcare students in communications around the role of healthcare students during the pandemic.
- **Good, multi-directional communication is essential** for protecting healthcare students’ mental wellbeing. Healthcare students must have multiple channels to be able to communicate with their institution, be that through practice or academic supervisors. Good emotional support is heavily reliant on strong communication – consistent, honest communication between institutions and students, providing lifelines, safety nets and options.
- **Institutions must put meaningful, co-created strategies in place** for supporting healthcare students on placement. Peer-to-peer support, for example, has been found to be a valuable source of help and emotional support for healthcare students. Universities should ensure that peer networks can still be facilitated online during the pandemic.

- **Healthcare students must be provided with the tools to develop a shared responsibility for their mental health and that of others**, including developing resilience and emotional intelligence to recognise when they may need to reach out for support. These are skills that universities can help healthcare students to build through curriculums that include a health gain approach alongside learning gain.
- **It must not be assumed that healthcare students have access to the equipment** and/or the digital literacy necessary for working and learning from home. Software and equipment can be specialist and students may have limited access. Universities should do all they can to provide healthcare students with the skills and equipment needed to learn remotely.
- **Anecdotal evidence suggests that healthcare students have performed better academically than in previous years.** This may be due to some students having less time on placement and more time studying. Course, college and faculty leaders should look for evidence of positive impacts from the pandemic and consider how these could be implemented long-term.

■ CASE STUDIES

University of Birmingham – Introduced wellbeing officers who are dedicated to supporting the wellbeing of students, in recognition of the fact that academic tutors are sometimes not best placed to offer pastoral support.

University of Coventry – Launched the ‘Connections Matter’ scheme, encouraging students and staff to find help in their local areas. A buddying app is also available to healthcare students. Mindfulness and mental wellbeing have been added to staff appraisals.

Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) – Healthcare students have been offered timetabled and drop-in sessions with senior members of staff and student groups to give practical and pastoral support, specifically for those on placement. ARU's Library offered an extended loan system for laptops for students. Healthcare students could take part in virtual placements and online consultations, allowing them to continue with their work in a safer environment. There is a buddying system that pairs up healthcare students for peer support.

■ RESOURCES

Reports and case studies

- [Council of Deans of Health: Student wellbeing case studies](#)
- [NHS People Promise](#)
- [NHS Wellbeing Report](#)
- [NHS Reducing Pre-registration Attrition and Improving Retention report](#)
- [Covid-19: healthcare students face unique mental health challenges](#)

Teaching models

- [Collaborative Learning in Practice \(CLIP\): Evaluation of a new approach to clinical learning](#)
- [Implementation of Collaborative Assessment & Learning Model \(CALM\)](#)

Guidance and tips

- [Office for Students: Student guide to coronavirus](#)
- [Royal College of Nursing: COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\) and your mental wellbeing](#)
- [General Medical Council: Information for trainees](#)
- [Nursing and Midwifery Council: Information for students and educators](#)
- [Health & Care Professions Council](#)

Support services

- [Mental Health at Work: Our Frontline](#)
- [Mind: Coping with going into work during coronavirus](#)