

Improving Numeracy Standards for UK Pharmacy Students

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Abstract : Medway School of Pharmacy, as part of an Equality Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) initiative run by the University of Kent, decided to take steps to try and negate disparities in numeracy competencies within students undertaking the Master of Pharmacy degree in order to combat a trend in pharmacy students' numerical abilities upon entry. This included a research driven project 1) to identify if pharmacy students are aware of weaknesses in their numeracy capabilities, and 2) recognise where their numeracy skillset is lacking. In addition to gaining this student perspective, a number of actions have been implemented to support students in improving their numeracy competencies. Reflective and quantitative analysis has shown promising improvements for the final year cohort of 2014/15 when compared to previous years. The method of involving student feedback into the structure of numeracy teaching/support has proven to be extremely beneficial to both students and teaching staff alike. Students have felt empowered and in control of their own learning requirements, leading to increased engagement and attainment. School teaching staff have received quality data to help improve existing initiatives and to innovate further in the area of numeracy teaching. In light of the recognised improvements, further actions are currently being trialled in the area of numeracy support. This involves utilising Virtual Learning Environment platforms to provide individualised support as a supplement to the increased numeracy mentoring (staff and peer) provided to students. Mentors who provide group or one-to-one sessions are now given significant levels of training in dealing with situations that commonly arise from mentoring schemes. They are also provided with continued support throughout the life of their degree. Following results from this study, Medway School of Pharmacy hopes to drive increasing numeracy standards within Pharmacy (primarily through championing peer mentoring) as well as other healthcare professions including Midwifery and Nursing.

Keywords : attainment, ethnicity, numeracy, pharmacy, support

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