

Raising awareness of cancer among healthcare students

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One in two people in the UK born after 1960 will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime (Cancer Research UK, 2018). With such high levels of prevalence, all nurses, regardless of specialty, workplace setting or levels of experience, will be caring for people affected by cancer. This mirrors pre-registration nursing students' experiences during their clinical placements as they are likely to be caring for people affected by cancer in most clinical placement settings. For some students this will be in a specialist cancer environment but, for many, they will be encountering patients affected by cancer in non-cancer specialist services.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) endeavour to equip students with knowledge and understanding about health conditions such as cancer. However, with packed curricula designed to meet the regulations set out by professional regulatory and statutory bodies, it can be challenging to include cancer-specific education in pre-registration programmes, especially if there is no cancer nursing champion within the organisation. This can result in students feeling unprepared for clinical placements, and apprehensive about looking after people with cancer. It is essential to increase access to cancer specialist knowledge and expertise to enable students to understand the impact of cancer on patients and families, demystify treatment, recovery and late effects, and increase students' confidence to care for those affected. This has been advocated by the Aspirant Cancer Career and Education Development programme (ACCEND). ACCEND is providing transformational reform in the education, training and career pathways for cancer support workers, nurses and allied health professionals supporting people affected by cancer in the UK (Potter and Taylor, 2022). ACCEND recognises the importance and value of students to current and future cancer care and has a workstream dedicated to addressing their needs.

The ACCEND pre-registration workstream brings together nursing and allied health professionals, working in HEIs across the UK, with interest and expertise in cancer, pre-registration pedagogy, clinical practice and research. To support students, HEIs, and practice supervisors working with students

in clinical practice, the workstream is developing resources including e-learning, implementation guidelines for HEIs and a national cancer student fellowship programme. ACCEND is due to release the Foundations of Cancer Care online modules, which will consist of nine e-learning modules on the nationwide NHS Learning Hub (<https://learninghub.nhs.uk>). They will be freely accessible within the ACCEND catalogue and will be available to all those with an NHS or university email address, or with an Open Athens account.

The modules have been written specifically for pre-registration students and reflect the learning outcomes recommended in the ACCEND (2023) *Career Pathway, Core Cancer Capabilities and Education Framework*. The modules cover a wide span of learning: the science of cancer, its impact on the individual, families and health professionals, self-care, ethics and clinical leadership in cancer, and evidence-based practice and applied research in cancer care. Each module includes interactive written content, videos of people sharing their experiences of living with and beyond cancer, self-assessment quizzes, plus reflective and workplace activities.

These modules provide foundational cancer education for pre-registration students. However, more resources are needed to enhance student learning, enable HEIs to increase the cancer content in their curricula and support practice supervisors. By working together, we can ensure that pre-registration students complete their programmes with the knowledge, skills and confidence to ask people affected by cancer how they are – and not feel scared of the answer.

If you would like more information about the pre-registration workstream ACCEND, please contact julie.armoogum@uwe.ac.uk. For general enquires relating to ACCEND, please email accend@hee.nhs.uk **BJN**

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