

## Virtual Simulated Placement at UEA

### **Context**

Like all universities, University of East Anglia cancelled clinical placements from Easter 2020 onwards. This most significantly affected our second-year cohort on their first clinical block placement.

In response to this, the UEA SLT team created an indirect, virtual placement enabling the students to: achieve the module learning outcomes, develop core clinical skills and apply theoretical knowledge. Students worked through time-released activities using anonymised clinical data culminating in role-playing the clinical teletherapy session. Students were supported within small peer-learning groups, peer supervision and group clinical supervision led by a registrant lecturer specialist in that client group. Student's feedback was positive and 2 main themes emerged in particular:

### **Resilience and Peer Support**

Charlotte McGinnes: "I was looking forward to a clinical placement which would offer unforeseen challenges and encourage the holistic development of my skillset as a student practitioner; while this virtual placement did take an unexpected format, I feel I have still had the opportunity to develop my skills and practices, and was pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoyed this placement.

Working in small peer groups for the duration of the placement encouraged us to build our team working and collaboration skills; we met several times a week to discuss the clinical data and explore one another's interpretation and the subsequent clinical reasoning that underpinned our planned virtual therapy sessions. Joining with a second group for weekly discussions, accompanied by our supervisor, further expanded the opportunity to explore different styles of intervention and support one another to consolidate our theoretical learning with the intervention activities we were creating.

This placement encouraged us to develop flexibility and openness when combating unexpected challenges and change, while maintaining professionalism, reliability and support for one another when working within our peer groups; paramount attributes for those working within the field of speech and language therapy."

### **Telehealth Skills & Knowledge**

Alex Porter: "The virtual placement provided us with a unique opportunity to explore telehealth as a vehicle for therapy. Through directed reading in telehealth, I became aware of just how possible it is to carry out both intervention and assessment successfully and its potential within the UK. As a young adult who has grown up in an era where technology is embedded in our day-to-day lives – learning about this medium has shown me how I can use my technological aptitude within my practice.

Having acquired theoretical and practical knowledge of teletherapy, I remained uncertain about how this will play out in practice once I qualify. My skills and confidence for teletherapy grew during our tutorials in teletherapy platforms, learning about creating interactive sessions and then practicing. When graduating in 2021 we will be in a unique position to share the evidence base with colleagues and encourage its use in practice to reach more isolated clients.”

### **Next Steps**

The clinical environment remains the most effective and appropriate practice-based learning opportunity. Students will only maximise this opportunity if they feel prepared and secure. There is clear benefit to enabling students to immerse themselves intensively in clinical reasoning for the whole intervention process, in an un-assessed supportive environment, before attending placement.

We look forward to encouraging placements locally that reflect the current service delivery models. We feel confident that we can effectively prepare students for this variety of models so that they can maximise the learning opportunities within the clinical environment.

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