

Growth opportunities from an 'out of comfort zone' placement

I am just over halfway through a 12-week placement at a medium-secure forensic psychiatric unit. Patients are detained under the Mental Health Act and all have a mental health diagnosis. They have all had contact with the legal system but are often too unwell to be detained in prison settings, which is why they are detained in these types of forensic units. Being a medium-secure setting many patients have very complex, and often traumatic, histories.

My placement is mainly virtual, so I join sessions via Skype. This brings its own challenges. For many patients in forensic settings, trust is often something that has been irreparably broken in their lives; therefore, it is hard for these individuals to build trust with their regular speech and language therapist (SLT), let alone with a student on a short-term virtual placement.

Something I find challenging are the occasions where patients decide, often at the very last moment, that they didn't feel happy to consent to me joining the sessions remotely. What I have learnt is it's not about the SLT or the student. It's about your patient/client and remembering that they are at the centre of all you do. So, I will take that and build on it.

The advice I would give to other students about to go on placements, especially to settings they had not expected to go to, would be to just say yes! Take the opportunity for growth, get out of your comfort zone and be open-minded. These are the situations where you will learn the most both professionally and personally.

It's also important to remember not to be afraid to ask questions, even in multidisciplinary team (MDT) meetings. We're still learning so no one is expecting you to know all the answers and make all the right deductions.

I have a wonderful practice educator who is always supportive and encouraging. She has taught me to always be mindful of ways to involve my patients, to ensure they have autonomy with their therapy sessions.

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