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Pharmacists as Educators – Engaging with the community through outreach workshops in schools in Cork city

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Introduction

Inspired by the UCC Campus engage initiative and in a quest to help final year pharmacy students develop higher-order thinking skills, students were tasked with designing and delivering outreach workshops on the “Role of the Pharmacist in Educating patients on microbes, antimicrobial usage, and infection prevention”. The assignment formed part of continuous assessment requirements for PF4015 Novel Drug Delivery module delivered to final year Pharmacy students on the B.Pharm course. These 1-hour interactive workshops were delivered to students across diverse age (primary and secondary) and socioeconomic backgrounds in schools during Science week in Nov 2016 & Nov 2017.

Method

Students were provided with a brief detailing the target age group (e.g. primary 5/6th class or secondary school – 2nd year students). Student were provided with a list of considerations to guide their initial discussions and planning, in addition to some learning resources related to activity planning including www.primaryscience.ie, Science Foundation Ireland, www.sfi/engagement and www.e-bug.eu/ and the DPSM/ESERO framework for inquiry. Students researched the topic and then met with the lecturer in 2 timetabled workshops. Additionally they engaged with the class teacher during a preliminary school visit to discuss their workshop plans and assess its feasibility in the given school environment. Pharmacy students undertook Child Protection training with the UCC Schools Programme UCC Plus+.

Pharmacy students were required to document their experience (i) an oral group-presentation to their peers in the 4th year pharmacy class and (ii) personal reflections were documented against the CPD template, Irish Institute of Pharmacy’s (IIOP), Figure 1.

Findings

Pharmacy students reflected on the how they learned best and used this inspiration to prepare educational, interactive and fun workshops. The workshops were structured using powerpoint presentations, interspersed with activities to engage and maintain the interest of school students. Feedback from school participants was gathered on learning (quizzes) and how the workshops were received (by survey – method varied depending on age). The workshops were really successful.

School pupils and teachers were really enthused by the workshops and we received requests to run additional workshops.

In the preparation and planning stage, the preliminary school visit provided the opportunity to discuss the class dynamics, the organization and delivery of the workshop including suitable activities. The class teachers provided an invaluable insight and prompted pharmacy students to think about logistical factors e.g. access to running water for hand-washing exercises, and managing groups of children.

Pharmacy students were required to document their learning as part of their CPD portfolio. At the outset students felt unprepared as they did not have formal teacher-training education. Evidence of critical thinking skills included synthesis of existing and new knowledge, enhanced transferable skills, particularly communication and planning.



Figure 1: Continuing professional development plan for pharmacists (<https://iiop.ie>)

Conclusions

Teaching approaches involving community engagement help prepare pharmacist students for professional practice.

Delivering workshops to different student cohorts (age, socioeconomic) require careful planning, particular to each group. Meeting with the teacher in advance as part of this planning was vital.

Novel assessment methods can be more time consuming for both students and staff.

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