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Outcomes of AAPE UK survey related to Allied Health Professionals and Pharmacists accessing Advanced Practice courses in the UK

Background

Over the past decade applicants to advanced practice courses have gradually broadened extending beyond nursing to include allied health professionals (AHP's) and pharmacists. Initially this reflected individual recognition of the potential benefits of advanced level of education for expanding their scope practice. More recently emerging policies from professional bodies have promoted advanced practice both within a career framework and for service transformation.

AAPE UK is currently involved in national advanced practice discussions in each of the four countries of the UK. This increasingly explores a multi-professional focus on advanced practice. It was therefore timely to review the student profile and trends for advanced practice courses to inform these discussions.

Approach

In May 2018 the AAPE UK membership (42 universities) were contacted with a request for information on the number of allied health professionals and pharmacists who had studied or were currently students on their advanced practice courses. They were asked for number and types in the following timeframes:

- 2015/2016 and earlier
- 2016/2017
- Current course numbers

Results

19 replies were received (15 England, 2 Wales, 1 Northern Ireland and 1 Scotland).

From responses, it was evident that not all courses keep detailed records of the breakdown of their students. Some reported the impression of increasing numbers but could not be specific. Others reported on stand-alone CPPD modules and Non Medical Prescribing. It is not therefore possible to give quantitative data at this point.

However from those who responded it can be noted that:

- Overall respondents reported receiving more interest from AHP's and pharmacist's year on year. Developments in prescribing legislation seemed to be a catalyst for interest for some professions eg physiotherapists.
- Many had revised their course to enable multi-professional entry in 2016 or subsequently.
- The range of healthcare professionals accessing advanced practice courses was: Physiotherapists, Pharmacists, Paramedics, Podiatrists, Diagnostic Radiographer, Therapeutic Radiographer, Occupational Therapist, Midwife, Speech and Language Therapist, Social Worker, Dietician, Operating Department Practitioner, Medical Scientist, Orthoptist.
- The most commonly cited were Physiotherapists, Pharmacists and Paramedics.
- Nursing students remained in the majority for all courses.
- One English university and one in Northern Ireland continue to only accept nursing students. The English university had plans to review this. The Northern Ireland (NI) University had recently had their course validated but noted that NI policy for advanced practice currently is solely for nurses.
- All have adopted a broad course title eg "Advanced Clinical Practice" or "Advanced Practice" approach.
- One university was moving to have two course titles "Advanced Practitioner pathway" and "Advanced Allied Health Practitioner" to make it more visible to AHPs but noted that most of the content would be shared.

Key themes in accompanying comments were:

- The respondents had witnessed benefits from multi-professional learning within their advanced practice courses with sharing of experiences and perspectives greatly enhancing the learning.
- A generic approach was strongly considered as appropriate for developing advanced practitioners with a primary focus on addressing service/clinical needs rather than advancement of individual careers.
- Separate courses for AHP's were viewed as a backwards step, reinforcing the notion of working in silos.
- While separate pathways were recognised to have a place eg Neonates, Paediatrics, anxiety was expressed that developing further specialist routes could pose issues of viability and sustainability.
- AHP's and pharmacists were also accessing stand-alone clinical assessment modules in increasing numbers. This was proving a good platform for them to "test" the potential and appropriateness of undertaking the rest of the advanced practice course.

- From student feedback, there is a need for the course delivery team to ensure they are embracing all perspectives and not being too “nursing” orientated

Conclusions

Increasing numbers of AHP’s and pharmacists are accessing Advanced Practice courses. This trend looks set to continue. Most universities have adapted their provision to embrace a multi-professional audience.

Next steps

1. AAPE UK will recommend that Course leaders note the number and range of healthcare professionals who start and successfully complete their advanced practice courses within their annual course monitoring report. This will enable identification of trends. It will also inform course promotion activities.
2. This survey will be repeated in 2 years.
3. This report will be shared with pertinent stakeholders to inform advanced practice discussions.

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