



ANMJ

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Making the most out of undergraduate study

Introduction

So you have decided to study nursing and/or midwifery , but not sure what to expect?

While feeling anxious and overwhelmed about study and clinical placements is totally normal, there are some things you can do to feel more prepared. Clinical facilitators and nursing and midwifery students share their experiences and tips to help you make the most of your learning experience. For more advice, go to: anmj.org.au



First impressions from a 1st year midwifery student

By Natalie Dragon

“I now realise that every woman’s journey is different,” says Eva Barba, first year Bachelor of Midwifery student at the Australian Catholic University (ACU). Eva shares her first impressions of midwifery with the ANMJ.



What attracted you to midwifery?

I have wanted to be a midwife since I was 10 years old. I was a young aunty, helping to care for quite a few babies.

Why did you choose Australian Catholic University?

My friend is doing nursing, and so we decided to go together through Australian Catholic University. I might consider doing nursing later on.

First impressions of the course?

It's been a transition from high school. I realise you have to be more independent. You don't have teachers saying "take this down" and the assignment load is a juggle – I had three due in one week – but I am enjoying it. I'm fulltime doing four subjects – Indigenous health, Evidence-based practice, Biology, and Midwifery (lab classes).

What are the highlights?

I really enjoy the midwifery class, the clinical hands-on. I've learnt how to take a blood pressure, make a hospital bed (including hospital corners!), abdominal palpation and examination, urinalysis, and CTG (cardiotocograph) and how to listen for a foetal heart rate. It's fun getting into the lab and learning. It makes it real.

How have you tackled some of the challenges?

We have 'PASS' leaders at the university, those students who have previously scored high in the units, who do tutoring sessions. I go to the Biology sessions which are really helpful.

We have a 'What's app' group for our first year intake and we ask each other lots of questions like about getting your vaccinations

for clinical and how to upload all our information for placement.

Where is your first clinical placement?

I'm going to [The Royal Women's Hospital \(Melbourne\)](#) in July. I'll be on the ante-natal ward. I'm nervous and excited and just looking forward to the whole experience. I'm interested to see what qualified midwives do and follow them and see what skills they have and to practice my own skills in the real life setting. I'd like to go to the [Joan Kirner Women & Children's at Sunshine Hospital](#) but I'm very happy to be going to The Women's.

What is the Continuity of Care Experience (CCE) program?

In the Continuity of Care program we follow 10 women during their pregnancy and where possible their labour and birth. This includes their pregnancy and postnatal care appointments. We're required to attend a minimum of their four appointments during pregnancy and two in the postnatal period.

I would love if there's any women out there I can follow during the course. I'm really looking forward to engaging with women. I feel like some women like the support of a student, especially during their first term. We're there just for them.

Tips for others considering studying midwifery?

My tips are to be organised and start your assignments early. Make sure you plan and manage your time properly. Go to the University Open days and explore the courses and talk to the representatives – I got hooked!

Learnings

I enjoy listening to podcasts including on women who have struggled to fall pregnant. I've begun to realise that every woman's journey is different.

I would love to be a private midwife helping women with home births – truly taking birthing back to women. I think being able to give birth in your home environment would be empowering.

For more information, visit [ACU's Bachelor of Midwifery Program](#)

10 things I wish I knew before my first clinical placement



Clinical placements give nursing and midwifery students the opportunity to build critical hands-on skills.

For first-year nursing student Matilda Preston, heading into her initial clinical placement in aged care presented an unknown. She felt nervous, and didn't know what to expect about working in the sector.

To help future nursing students, Matilda shares the 10 top things she wishes she knew before attending clinical placement.

1. Preparation

Arrive at least 15 minutes before you have to be at the facility to have the time to put your stuff away and get ready, as well as ensuring that you have your notepad and pen handy to take notes at handovers.

Always be prepared for anything in aged care – it's very different to what is shown on TV, and there's a lot of tasks you don't even realise nurses do in nursing homes.

2. Communication

When communicating with the healthcare team, make sure you understand them and they understand you before a task is completed.

As a student nurse, you are bound to find things a little bit confusing, and that is okay. Ask them to repeat themselves so you know what your role on a shift is, or who you are supposed to be buddied up to.

As well as the healthcare team, you have the patients and families to communicate with. This is one of the hardest parts of nursing, but the more you practice, the easier it becomes.

Converse with the patients with some everyday conversation if you aren't busy, and when you are providing care, ensure that you communicate what exactly is happening and why. When communication is clear, everything moves so much more smoothly.

3. Assertiveness

As daunting as it is being a student nurse, only having completed a year of university and attending a placement, you know your scope of skills, and you may have to remind those in the facility of them.

You may have to remind them that you can actually assist in transfers, or showers. On the other hand, it may be that you have to remind them that you cannot actually do something, as you have not been taught it yet.

Being a student nurse is about learning. You have to ensure that you assert your presence, as it is required, and make sure you are getting the most out of the placement.

4. Scope of practice

Know your scope of practice, understand everything that you can or can't do, and even what you can or can't do without supervision.

When you know your scope of practice, you are able to inform the healthcare team that you work within your scope, to ensure that you only do what you can do, while still learning.

5. Patient-centred care

When you're a student nurse, you are able to spend time getting to know the patients by sitting and just having a conversation.

Ask them about their families or their lives. You can learn so much just from what is around their rooms (pictures, cards).

During my placement, I realised how much the patients actually appreciate student nurses, as they are fresh new faces and love a chat. You make their day just by asking questions to get to know them.

6. Support between other students

Lean on your fellow student nurses. You will be placed with other students to give some familiarity to the new environment, but they are your best friends for the placement.

You may not always work at the same times, but if you don't understand something that you've been asked to do, they are there for a conversation.

In your breaks you can talk about what you've learned and just be a friendly support. They are always just as nervous and stressed as you, so let it all out together, and don't close yourselves off to each other.

7. Asking for feedback

After you complete a shift, or assist your buddy nurse with a task, ask them how they think you did, or if there's anything you can improve on for the next day. This assists you with learning, and shows the buddy nurse that you are keen to learn and want to be actively involved.

8. Accept learning challenges

There will be many things that you come across on placement that you might not think too highly of. The only way you can learn – especially in a hands-on role such as nursing – is by actively participating every chance you get. Even when you may be grossed out, or you might be not so sure in your previous practice, ask for help, and still try it.

9. Breathe

Make sure you breathe, don't stress too much. It really isn't as scary as you think, and you do know much more than you think. You will surprise yourself everyday with your knowledge retention.

10. Enjoy

I had the best time on placement; once I found my footing, it was amazing. The first couple of days anywhere new is always tough, but push through, rely on your other student nurses, and just take in everything. You will have fun, and you will enjoy it.

Q&A: Third-year nursing student

By Natalie Dragon

Third-year CQUniversity student Danelle Ireland shares her insights with the ANMJ.

What attracted you to nursing?

I have been a professional photographer for 20 years, specialising in newborn and baby portraiture. Then COVID came along and I was looking for a change. When I reflected on what I really wanted to do, nursing came to my mind. My best friend from high school unexpectedly passed away from a brain aneurysm and my son was diagnosed with a heart condition that I was completely clueless about it. So, I guess the attraction to nursing for me, is understanding the body and helping my family to understand what's going on with their bodies and health.

What are you enjoying in the BA Nursing program?

I am really enjoying my placements, as I have had amazing opportunities to learn and grow and gain more skills. I also enjoy the flexibility of online learning as with having kids, and working part time as an assistant in nursing in the emergency department, the flexibility is definitely a bonus.

What do you find most challenging in the course/study?

Definitely trying to find the hours to fit everything in. Also, I set the bar high with insanely high expectations so when I don't quite achieve that it is challenging.



Do you have any study tips/methods or advice for those starting their course?

Be organised! Get all of your checks for placements done early as some can take quite a bit of time to complete. Find people who you can connect with online or in person so you can bounce ideas off each other and get clarity on things you don't quite understand. Get up to speed on using acronyms and word tricks to remember things.

What clinical placements have you done so far? What have been your favourites and why?

I have had a variety of different placements – cardiac, orthopaedic, mental health and general medical. The best placement was my first placement, which was a rural placement in the general wards. The learning was amazing, with very supportive staff who were eager to teach me and it cemented my interest in nursing.

Do you have any tips for preparing for clinical placement or while on placement?

Get lots of sleep and take a little notebook to write down terms/medications that you aren't sure of. Don't be afraid to ask a lot of questions!

What specific advice would you give overall to students?

1st year – Get to know your way around Moodle (the university online management system), Sonia (clinical placement portal) and the library as they are your best friend.

2nd year – Don't give up...do little chunks at a time. It may seem overwhelming and you may feel like you're in over your head (well for me it did) – reach out if you're struggling and really take time in the pharmacology and pathophysiology units as they are very heavy content wise.

Is there a specialty or area of nursing you want to specialise in?

I would love to go into something fast paced so either the emergency department, surgical or cardiac would be the direction I want to go.

If you weren't doing nursing what would you be doing?

I'd probably still be photographing newborns and babies and breaking my back from the huge amount of sitting on the floor and awkward positions!



“2nd year – Don't give up...do little chunks at a time. It may seem overwhelming and you may feel like you're in over your head (well for me it did) – reach out if you're struggling and really take time...”

‘Be a sponge’: Tips to nail clinical placement

By Robert Fedele

Clinical placements give undergraduate nursing and midwifery students the opportunity to transfer theory into practice and consolidate their knowledge and skills.

Registered nurse, Dr Tanya Langtree is a lecturer in Nursing and Midwifery at James Cook University, and Academic Lead: Practice Integration, providing on the ground support for students undertaking clinical placement in the Townsville region.

JCU has about 1,000 undergraduate nursing and midwifery students across four campuses. Students undertake clinical placements in a variety of settings including hospitals, medical clinics and residential aged care facilities.

A series of Professional Experience Placement briefings are held for first year students early on in their studies so they have a sound understanding of the clinical placement structure and their obligations in preparing for and attending placement.

Topics discussed during these briefings include explaining pre-placement requirements, such as what paperwork needs to be submitted beforehand, what to expect on placement, appropriate conduct while on placement, setting goals for placement, and being proactive while on placement to ensure students make the most of the opportunity.

Tanya says being prepared is crucial, so it is important that students have access to key contact information, such as their facilitator’s phone number and email.

If they are heading to a new unit or hospital, she suggests students take into account travel time, and even being aware of things such as parking fees.

She says the first year of nursing is about learning the fundamentals – such as principles of medication administration, how to assess patients, and person-centred care.

“As the years go on, students advance their ability to link theory to practice,” Tanya says.

“They learn more complex assessment skills and interventions and their scope broadens as they progress through their degrees.

“For first year students, it’s always important that they remember that they’re not expected to know everything. They only know a small piece of the puzzle at this point in time and need to work within that scope.”

Tanya shared her top tips on how to thrive on clinical placement with the ANMJ.

Be prepared

Tanya says it is important that students invest time into reading the Professional Experience Placement (PEP) documents that they will be assessed on, familiarise themselves with the standards, and read the orientation manual for the ward.

“You’ll then be able to develop goals that are actually meaningful and targeted for that placement, which will in turn increase your enthusiasm for learning. When you’re well prepared, facilitators and staff you’re working with are also more likely to take you under their wing.”

Be proactive

Clinical placements offer a chance to link theory to practice, so Tanya encourages students not to turn away learning opportunities and, instead, seek them out.

“By that I mean, just because you may have done one injection, do as many as possible. Don’t ever turn away learning opportunities that you may see as routine care because you learn something different every day as a nurse and you learn how to adapt a clinical intervention to best meet that person’s current situation and needs. It is also important to not be focused purely on tasks; instead you should be person-centred wherever possible.”

“You’ll then be able to develop goals that are actually meaningful and targeted for that placement, which will in turn increase your enthusiasm for learning. When you’re well prepared, facilitators and staff you’re working with are also more likely to take you under their wing.”

If unsure, ask for help

“Nurses don’t know everything, we never will know everything, so don’t be afraid to seek out clarification. That’s what your facilitator is there for. They can also point you in the right direction.”

Create a work-life balance

Tanya says it’s important students get plenty of rest prior to going out on placement and get enough sleep, eat a balanced diet, and find time for exercise while undertaking placement.

“Nursing work is stressful work. We work in dynamic clinical environments. You never know what you’re going to get, so you actually have to make sure you practice good self-care to ensure you can perform at your best while on placement.”

Embrace learning opportunities

Tanya says students need to be prepared while on clinical placement and be enthusiastic for learning.

“Never sit back. Even if it’s quiet on the ward, there’s always something to do, whether that’s talking to the patients you’re caring for, or even restocking the utility room where the equipment is so when somebody asks you to get that in an emergency you know exactly where it is. Learn, be a sponge, and take from those experiences nurses what they’ve learnt.”

“Nurses don’t know everything, we never will know everything, so don’t be afraid to seek out clarification...”

