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Values Based Recruitment and the NHS Constitution: Making sure student midwives meet the brief

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Abstract

Since publication of the findings from the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry (Francis, 2013), which clearly identified levels of substandard care and failings from staff in exhibiting core values such as care and compassion, it became evident that improvements in levels of care were needed. In response, Health Education England (HEE) published its National Values Based Recruitment (VBR) framework (2014) to encourage Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to complement their existing recruitment processes with VBR, to ensure applicants to undergraduate healthcare programmes such as midwifery, demonstrate those values which align with the principles of the NHS Constitution (DH, 2015). This article will discuss how the University of Northampton piloted the integration of the VBR framework into its interview process through adopting a Multiple Mini Interview (MMI) approach.

Keywords: Values Based Recruitment (VBR); the NHS Constitution; pre-registration midwifery; multiple mini interviews (MMI)

Introduction

This article will discuss Values Based Recruitment (VBR) in the context of the selection and recruitment of student midwives to a 3 year undergraduate midwifery programme and discuss how the qualities of compassion; the ability to work with others; the ability to demonstrate a commitment to quality of care,

valuing the individual; an understanding of the importance of respect and dignity and a pledge to improving lives can be identified by this process (DH, 2015).

The NHS Constitution establishes the principles and values of the NHS in England. It sets out rights to which patients, public and staff are entitled, and pledges which the NHS is committed to achieve, together with responsibilities, which the public, patients and staff owe to one another to ensure that the NHS operates fairly and effectively.

(Department of Health (DH), 2015:2)

What is VBR?

VBR is defined by Health Education England (HEE) as:

an approach which attracts and recruits students, trainees and employees on the basis that their individual values and behaviours align with the values of the NHS Constitution, alongside their skills and aptitude

(HEE, 2013:Values Based Recruitment)

Every HEI has its own recruitment strategy; however in 2014 the Department of Health (DH) tasked Health Education England (HEE) with implementing Values Based Recruitment (VBR) in the selection of students for all undergraduate healthcare programmes (Miller and Bird, 2014). The evidence assimilated by HEE (2013) in relation to what VBR can offer HEIs delivering undergraduate health programmes, suggests a standardised approach to recruitment should be adopted, whilst still allowing enough flexibility for individual innovation in its implementation across different institutions.

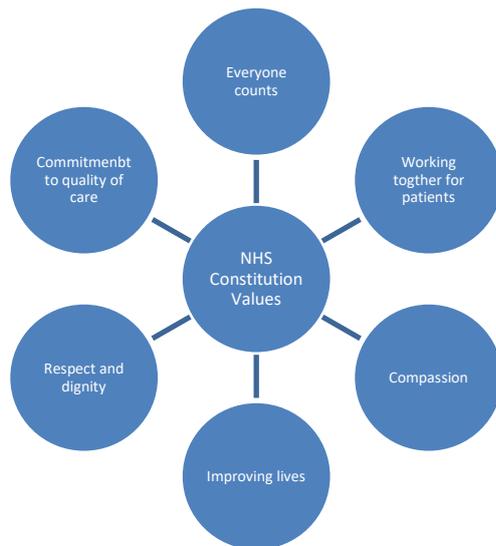


Figure 1

Values defined within the NHS constitution (DH, 2013:5)

Interview Preparation

In the invitation to interview, candidates were provided with weblinks to the HEE website (<http://hee.nhs.uk/wp-content/blogs.dir/321/files/2014/10/VBR-Framework.pdf>) and NHS Constitution document (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/448466/NHS_Constitution_WEB.pdf) and asked to create a pictorial representation of their interpretation of one of the VBR qualities identified in figure 1.

Multiple Mini Interviews:

Use of the Multiple Mini Interview (MMI) in recruitment to health programmes is not a new concept, with a current evidence base spanning 10 years (Eva *et al.*, 2004). However, authors such as Miller and Bird (2014) acknowledge some of the possible pitfalls of using this strategy, for example the possibility for it to become a tick box exercise, with candidates citing 'buzz words' cited in the NHS Constitution (NHS, 2015) without demonstrating any depth of understanding of the underlying concepts and principles. It is suggested that with careful planning and design of the activities undertaken and their associated assessment in each of the MMI stations this factor can be mitigated against.

In 2014 the midwifery team at the University of Northampton aligned their recruitment strategy with the VBR framework by adapting the individual interview element of the selection process to include MMIs. By conducting the MMIs in the hospital setting, the recruitment process reflected the standard for

pre-registration midwifery education to consist of 50% theory and 50% practice (NMC, 2009).

All three stations looked to assess applicants' attributes in relation to VBR, including the 6Cs: care, compassion, commitment, courage, communication and competence (CNO and DH CNA, 2012).

MMI Station 1

- **Facilitator:** current student midwife ambassadors for the University
- **Task:** involved the candidate answering a telephone call in delivery suite from a woman in early labour. Applicants were required to gather and document key elements of information, a template for which was provided
- **Rationale:** this MMI was designed to evaluate written communication skills and assess the candidate's ability to demonstrate a caring and compassionate approach in a pressurised environment

MMI Station 2

- **Facilitator:** a senior midwife
- **Task:** required the applicant to explain and justify how their pictorial representation reflected the chosen VBR quality as identified in figure 1
- **Rationale:** this MMI was designed to evaluate the candidate's ability to effectively and competently communicate their interpretation of the quality identified as well as demonstrating commitment to the selection process in the form of a well-conceived, well designed resource

MMI Station 3

- **Facilitator:** a lecturer
- **Task:** consisted of the lecturer asking a series of questions and presenting mini scenarios for discussion
- **Rationale:** this MMI was designed to elicit the candidate's motivations for

entering the midwifery profession, as well as evaluating communication, care and compassion. The mini scenarios provided the opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate understanding of the concept of courage and its appropriate application

Each workstation was assessed and scored individually by those leading the station followed by a standardisation discussion between the student, senior midwife and lecturer.

What next?

All providers of undergraduate healthcare programmes, including midwifery, should embed VBR in their selection and recruitment strategies. Applicants who apply for midwifery undergraduate programmes need to be able to demonstrate, the values based attributes identified by Health Education England (2014) and there is evidence to suggest that employing the MMI model rather than a single interview format may be a more reliable method of assessment (Eva et al, 2004; Humphrey *et al.*, 2008; Eva *et al.*, 2009; O'Brien *et al.*, 2011; Pau *et al.*, 2013). The qualities of VBR must be assessed; however it is up to individual HEI to decide their method of assessment.

The pilot discussed in this article aimed to adopt a flexible approach in its design and implementation of MMIs to promote, rather than stifle the candidates' individuality, creativity and innovation in order to successfully recruit student midwives who, on qualification, will positively affect the nature and culture of maternity services.

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