

Introduction:

This study examined the perspectives and experiences of paramedicine students engaged in Clinical Placement activities during COVID19. Clinical Placement is usually undertaken with local ambulance services, however due to COVID19 lockdowns and social distancing requirements some of the student cohort sustained a reduction in placement contact hours or a cancellation of their placement.

Aims:

This study explored the perceptions of student paramedics regarding the use of AUSMED, an external Online Education platform, and whether this was successful in providing an alternative learning resource when faced with a reduction in Clinical Placement hours and/or cancellation of Clinical Placement during COVID19. The study also investigated if AUSMED was successful in assisting students with completion of both course-based and individual learning objectives of Clinical Placement.

Results:

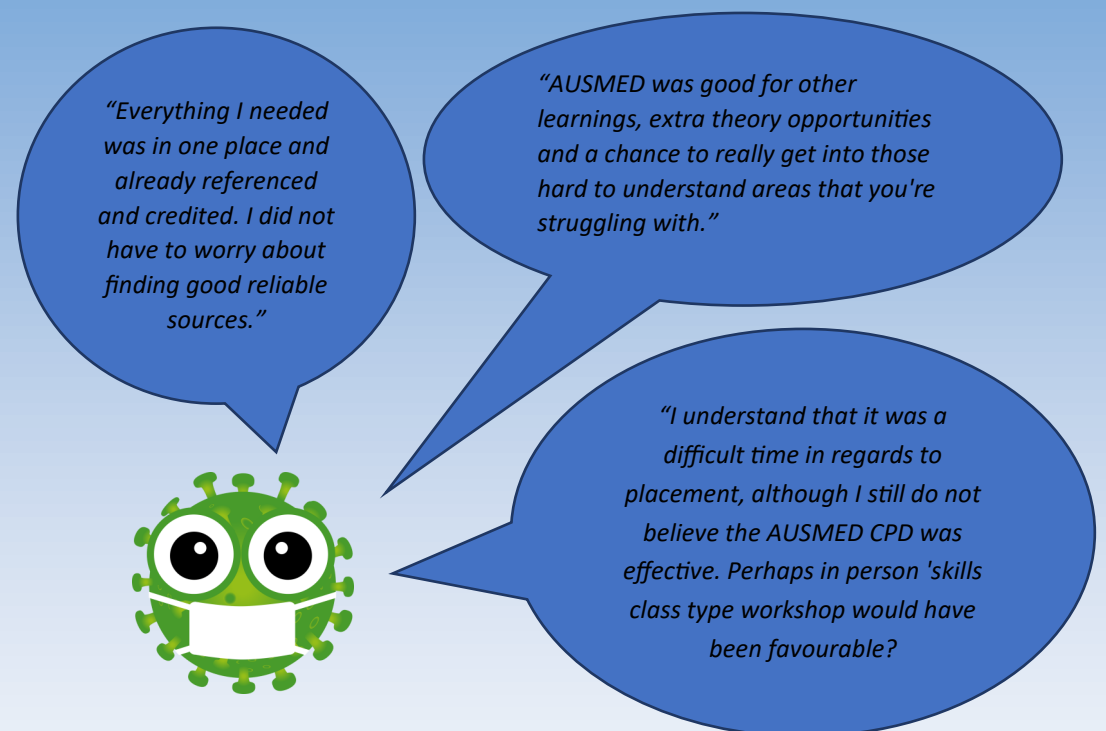
This study explored student paramedic perceptions about using an external Online Education platform, as a successful alternative learning resource for completion of course-based and individual learning objectives of Clinical Placement, when faced with a reduction in Clinical Placement hours and/or cancellation of Clinical Placement during COVID19. Data analysis revealed two main themes: Firstly, adjustment to change during a pandemic can lead to discourse between students, paramedics, and academics impacting the confidence and progress of students; and secondly, modification of assessment task(s) to comply with pandemic related restrictions can impact student stress levels and their ability to achieve learning outcomes.

Discussion:

The study surveyed first, second, and third-year paramedic students (N=26) who completed an anonymous online questionnaire with free-text options. Free-text data were analysed through generic qualitative methods, and first and second cycle coding.

Paramedicine students whose Clinical Placement hours were either reduced and/or cancelled due to COVID19 were given free access to an AUSMED subscription to assist them in meeting learning outcomes of Clinical Placement. The pandemic challenged students' perceptions regarding paramedic learning being confined to time on a truck with an ambulance service. While the AUSMED platform enables a broad range of activities and resources it was notable that the themes not present in the results included development of clinical reasoning and decision making. Thereby prompting the question: Does the theory practice gap exist after all?

The major findings from this study echoed sentiments which have also been described in health and education literature (1, 2, 3). Students who participated in the AUSMED learning platform identified several themes that require discussion. Whilst students praised the flexibility and accessibility of the AUSMED content, they sometimes struggled to link this information to the practical application of certain tasks that would normally be undertaken in a clinical setting. Is online/non-practical learning a valid way of achieving placement related goals? The answer can depend on viewpoint, but the overarching theme that practical experience was viewed as more important than theory-based learning



was hard to ignore. Is paramedic learning just about working in an ambulance service? The most significant feedback regarding the student AUSMED experience was self-generated. The AUSMED survey did not specifically ask students to report on the perceived development of their clinical reasoning and decision making skills, yet this theme was commented on multiple times.

A common finding in the literature, confirmed by this study is the impact that COVID19 had on course progression, confidence and preparedness of undergraduate university students. The extant literature also describes the theory-practice gap in paramedicine, suggesting that potential benefits from bespoke learning experiences can assist in aligning industry, academia and student expectations in relation to work-readiness (4). Students participating in this survey, felt that a theory-practice gap did exist.

References:

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