

Embracing Change; A new Radiotherapy Clinical Support Model for Practice Placements.

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Introduction

Pre-registration students training in Radiotherapy and Oncology (RONC) at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) have received clinical support via a unique clinical support model provided by a Professional Development Facilitator (PDF) since 2002¹. The PDF was an academic member of staff from SHU who worked closely with the practice placement site they were assigned to, often being where they had previously worked clinically. The 9 practice placement sites utilised by RONC SHU are Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Leeds, Hull, Sheffield, Nottingham, Derby, Lincoln and Leicester. The PDF role was developed due to a response to change within the Radiotherapy training environment² and was a popular resource amongst students, clinical staff and the PDFs themselves. In 2017 economic changes to health care education encouraged an opportunity to replace, adapt and enhance the PDF clinical support model to continue practice placement support with a new model named the Placement Learning Tutor (PLT) model with the PLT replacing the PDF.

Pre - Consultation

The PDFs (clinical team who will become the PLT) attended a number of workshops to discuss what important factors should be incorporated in the new PLT model. Over the years the PDF model had evolved in the 9 clinical placements sites, this opportunity allowed us to look at what was needed most by the students and the clinical staff. To enhance this further various clinical support models provided by other Health and Wellbeing courses at SHU were reviewed and discussed with peers from across the faculty. The ideas that were developed were supported with literature and policy (namely, the Health and Care Professions Practice Education Guide³ and the Quality Standards for Practice Placements⁴) to ensure an evidence based approach was established. This resulted in the development of a structured but yet flexible model that would still support the individual needs of the RONC students and the practice placement environment, even though the overall number of visits are reduced.

Outline of the Placement Learning Tutor model

As a result of the preliminary work an outline of the clinical support model Fig.1.was developed for consultation. The clinical team were keen to ensure that the students developed a community on their practice placements so they would support each other within the clinical departments. The team were also conscious of the impact on the clinical staff in the absence of a more physically present member of SHU staff. The PLT model includes; an academic contact for the practice placement site and students, to provide advice and support, set activities to aid development of the student as a professional, increase resilience, increase student community and the opportunity for 1-2-1s.

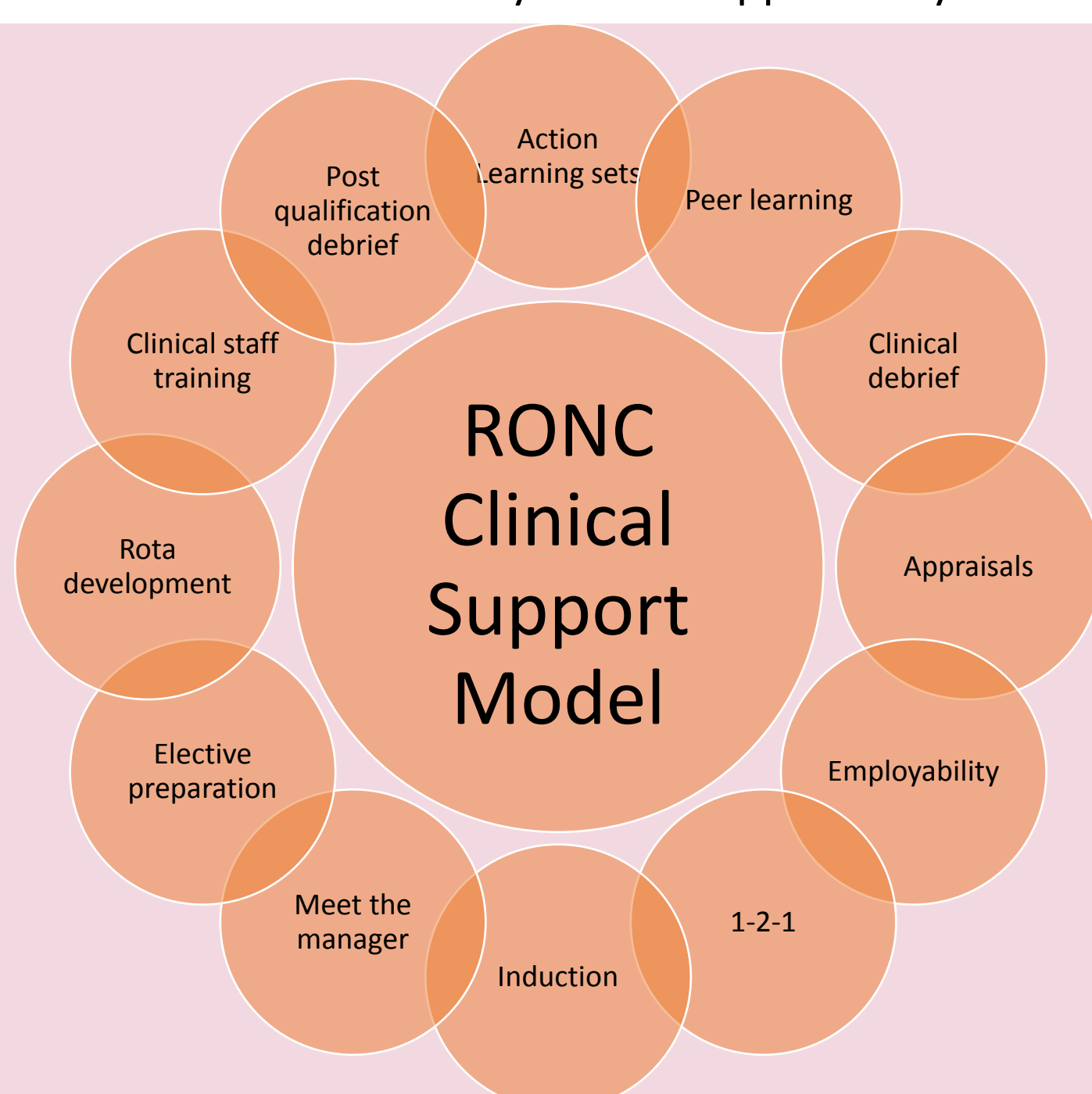
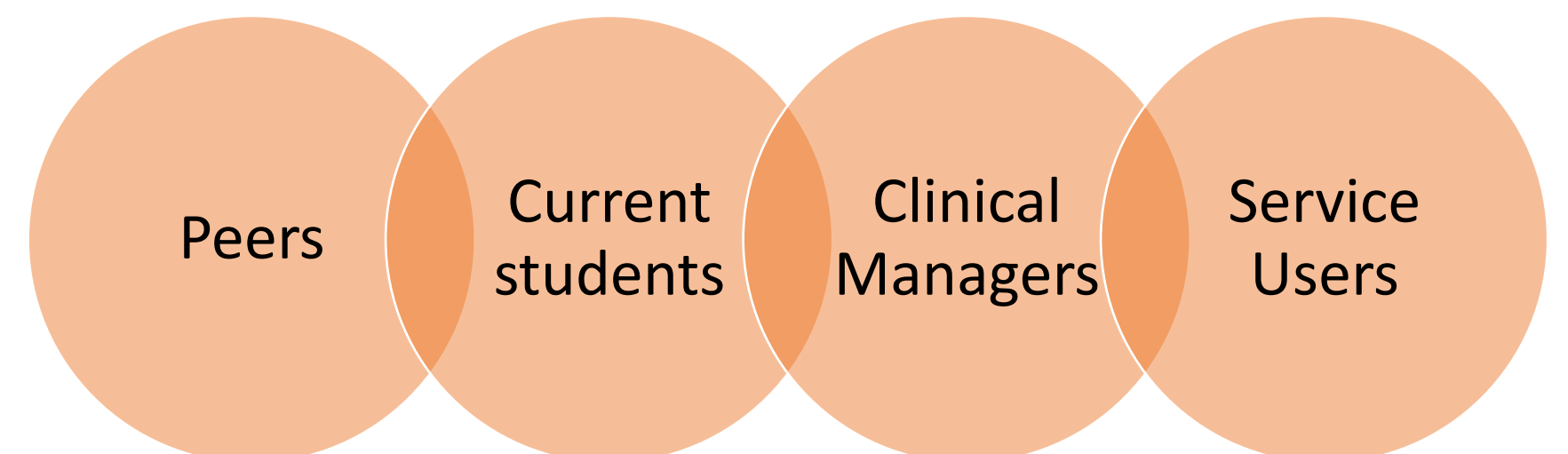


Figure 1. An Outline of the RONC PLT model

Consultation



There was the opportunity for discussion with PDFs and other members of the course team if any clarification was required. All comments were collated via face to face sessions and email and informed any further discussions around the model.

Feedback

Overall, the results of the consultation were positive with some issues solved with further explanation. Peers were supportive of the new model, particularly in the way the visits were mapped to the progression of the student throughout their training pathway. Current students were originally concerned that they would be un-supported in practice placement due to the reduction in physical visits but were relieved to see a structure that provided face to face contact and additional contact methods. Clinical managers felt the challenges were addressed in the most positive way possible and were supportive and encouraging for the implementation of the new PLT model. A change in the provision of practice placement support from SHU also allowed clinical staff to flourish in a new area for those who have a particular interest in pre-registration student education. Those clinical staff members who maybe embarking or continuing in roles as practice educators are supported by the Clinical Lead and the PLT for the practice placement, to ensure their skill development in this new area of practice.

Implementation

The new PLT model commenced on the 1st August 2018, although it is in the early stages of implementation it is important that the model is continually evaluated and adapted for the needs of the students and the practice placement sites. A continual review of the PLT model via questionnaires and focus groups will ensure the support provided is fit for purpose. Some of the main focus points are: student and clinical partners satisfaction with the provision, effect on student retention, support resources are reliable and informative, and job satisfaction for the PLT.

To further support our new and existing practice educators an email group with the clinical lead, course leaders and professional lead, has created an easy forum to ask questions and gain information. The practice educators are encouraged to gain accreditation from the College of Radiographers, and support is provided by the clinical lead.

Acknowledgements

The clinical lead would like to acknowledge the supportive input received from various colleagues at SHU. Also the support of our 9 clinical partners and their openness to change has been invaluable.

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