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Open Days: A Solution to Clinical Visits?

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INTRODUCTION

When applying to an undergraduate course to study Diagnostic Radiography, quite reasonably most Universities expect prospective students to attend a clinical visit to a Radiology Department and to reflect on this experience as part of their personal statement. In the past prospective students spent 2 days in department with minimal HR checks but the guidelines changed a few years ago whereby for under 18's they would need to have HR approval which includes a health check. For over 18's this is more in-depth and they would need CRB checks too. The process can take between 4-8 weeks which is very time consuming, costly and a lengthy process and impossible for those wanting experience at short notice. The number of those requesting placement increased to a level that was unmanageable with no extra funding in HR and Radiology to support this. Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University proposed the solution of 'open days' which would enable prospective students to gain a realistic taste of Radiography in a different way. CRB checks are generally not required if attendees are closely supervised at all times.

THE 'SHEFFIELD APPROACH'

In 2008, The Radiology Department at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals started to arrange clinical open days during the period between September and January to coincide with the UCAS application process.

Events are arranged on Saturdays. Dates and details are advertised on Sheffield Hallam University recruitment website and flyers are e-mailed to local colleges. Students are required to make the enquiry via e-mail and are required to complete an application form and submit a CV. At this stage in the process UCAS information is not available. This provides the organisers the opportunity to check the details of the applicant and ensure they either have the qualifications or on track for gaining the required entry requirements before places are confirmed. At this time we reinforce the point that students are strongly recommended to attend one of the University open days to consider their academic options. Each event is restricted to 25 students in order to ensure a high quality experience over a 4 hour time period.

It requires four members of the team to run each event. An administrator who confirms places and is the receptionist on the day. A lead person who facilitates the whole event, a Radiographer and a 2nd or 3rd year student radiographer.

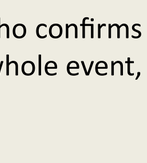
The programme includes the following:

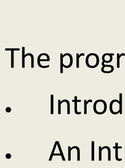
- Introductions and aims of the day
- An Introduction to Diagnostic Radiography
- Behind Closed Doors - The A to Z to Radiography
- A Student's Perspective of Diagnostic Radiography
- Tour of Department, Observing procedures and meeting staff
- Question and Answer session

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The pilot study was conducted in 2008 and received very positive feedback such as;

'The event was realistic and showed us the real demanding aspects of studying Radiography—amazing and inspiring'





'Everyone was extremely passionate and knowledgeable, I am super excited to apply now'

'I found the event excellent, I have enjoyed it and found out lots of information on aspects of Radiography I did not know'

The concept was accepted as an acceptable route to gaining clinical experience and has continued to evolve to the present day. The positive working relationship between clinical and academic partners continues to develop, both being involved in student selection at all stages of the recruitment process.

Event Volume

The number of events has now increased to 8 per annum which enable us to provide experience to 200 prospective students. Each event is still restricted to 25 students in order to ensure that groups are small enough to get to know the applicants and making them interactive and also check for suitability of candidates.

Event Feedback

Students leave the open day with a certificate of attendance which identifies when they came, what they did, and provides them with space to reflect on their experience. This is then sent by the student to all the Universities that the student applies.

Geographical Spread

Initially the Open Days were mainly attended by prospective students living within a 30 mile radius of Sheffield. The net has gradually grown wider and wider, year by year, to the point where we are now have attendees from all over England. Whilst Sheffield Hallam University does attract high performing students from across the UK, there is no requirement for them to attend a clinical visit or Open Day in Sheffield; in fact students are encouraged to visit their local hospital. This is often achieved by applicants from Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Looking Ahead

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust offers Open Day places on a first come first served basis but has now reached the point of saturation and we are no longer able to adequately support the needs of the local community. Extending the size of our groups is not desirable as this reduces the quality of the Open Day. Logistically we are unable to offer any more than 8 dates in the time period and so we are faced with the dilemma of needing to adopt a quota system, unless other hospitals throughout the UK embrace the need to provide local clinical experience for prospective students. Any department looking to introduce a similar approach needs to be one that is functioning on the day. At Sheffield our 'tour' includes an 'empty' department to see a General Radiography room, Ultrasound, Fluoroscopy, Angio, CT and then moves on with smaller groups into the working department to have a brief look at General Radiography, Trauma, CT, MRI and Ultrasound.

CONCLUSION

The clinical open day provides an opportunity for prospective students to experience a Radiology Department and is ideally suited to under 18's, where alternative channels are becoming increasingly difficult to achieve. Student feedback from the events is good, providing enough experience to inform their personal statements. This approach is time efficient, enabling a large volume of prospective students to experience the Radiology Department in short bursts, creating controlled disruption to the clinical workflow. Staff supporting these events find them enjoyable and a key part of continuous professional education.

FURTHER WORK

Providing clinical open days in many other hospitals around the UK will help prospective students gain the necessary experience closer to home. The SCoR Admissions Tutors Forum approved clinical feedback form can be utilised by all sites as evidence of attendance, if preferred. A guide to help clone the Sheffield approach is available upon request from the authors.