Evaluation of the NES Foundation Programme for Pharmacists in Wales

Executive Summary

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Background

In 2018, the Pharmacy division of Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) adopted the NHS Education Scotland (NES) Pharmacy Foundation Training Programme model and materials. The two-year Foundation Programme was implemented in Wales over two cohorts, one starting in October 2018 and one in October 2019. The Programme was targeted primarily at community pharmacists. Alongside adopting the NES training programme, Wales also adopted the same evaluation protocol. The evaluation of the Foundation Programme in Wales was led by CUREMeDE and direction was provided by the Scotland evaluation team at the University of Aberdeen.

Aims

The aim of this study was to evaluate the impact of the implementation of the NES Foundation Programme in Wales, exploring whether the Programme meets the needs of the pharmacists and contributes to their professional development, whether responses to the Programme change over time, and how the Programme might be improved.

Methods

In following the NES evaluation strategy, data collection was planned to take place on three occasions: at the start of the Programme, at the midway point, and at the end of the Programme. Data were collected from both pharmacists and tutors on the Foundation Programme via focus group discussions.

However, our methods were adapted in response to circumstances and where pharmacists did not complete the programme, they were invited to participate in a one-to-one exit telephone interview. A one-to-one telephone interview was also conducted with the HEIW Programme Coordinator at the end of the programme to gain a broader perspective of the Foundation Programme's implementation.

All focus groups and interviews were recorded, transcribed and transferred into NVivo software for pattern coding. Coding frameworks were provided by NES and adapted and expanded where appropriate in the context of our data.

Evaluation results were presented at a stakeholder event. This provided stakeholders opportunity to feedback on findings and discuss the future of pharmacist training in Wales.

Results

In total, five focus groups and 12 interviews were carried out, yielding a total of 7 hours and 21 minutes of conversation data.

In terms of expectations, tutors felt the Foundation Programme would address some of the gaps in undergraduate and pre-registration training for pharmacists, particularly around the development of non-clinical skills. The pharmacists themselves also hoped to develop their non-clinical skills and gain more confidence.

The participating pharmacists reported that the practice-based components of the Programme (such as event analyses, care plans and miniCEXs) were of more value than the short reports and reflections which were seen as less useful and more time-consuming. Pharmacists generally felt the tutor role was the most valuable component of the Programme and they also valued the study days. Pharmacists held mixed views on the extent to which the Programme had impacted their practice.

None of the 14 pharmacists completed the Foundation programme and cited both professional and personal reasons. The most commonly reported barrier to completion was workload. Pharmacists, tutors and the Programme Coordinator all recognised the lack of a valuable incentive to complete the Programme given that it was not well-recognised among employers and lacked accreditation. All challenges were exacerbated by the pandemic.

Participants provided suggestions for improvements, including the provision of protected time, clearer information from the outset (to manage expectations), streamlining the Programme and providing an incentive.

Despite the challenges and non-completion, participants judged the Programme was of value and filled a gap in the training and development pathway of pharmacists.

Stakeholder Event
The stakeholder event provided an opportunity for CUREMeDE to report on the feedback from pharmacists and tutors and seek stakeholder comments and reflections. Discussions among stakeholders validated findings from the evaluation and the presentations from HEIW illustrated how they had used the evaluation findings to inform the development of the new post-registration support programme.

Implications
It was evident from our data that pharmacists and tutors expected that the Foundation Programme would benefit pharmacists. Although some pharmacists and tutors saw the Programme as a good idea which addressed a need, it was evident that some gaps remained and, in some cases, participants gained little from the Programme. There is scope to better identify where the key gaps lie in undergraduate and pre-registration programmes to better tailor post-registration training to need. Additional, more detailed information about the Programme would help to manage expectations and ensure the right pharmacists pursue the Programme. More structured progress monitoring would help pharmacists to focus their learning and track their progress. Time and workload were key barriers to engaging with the Programme, particularly in community settings. Protected time would be a welcome addition but would need employers to value the Programme and sufficient service backfill would be needed.

Conclusion
Over the implementation phase, developments within the wider healthcare systems significantly influenced both the Foundation Programme and the unfolding evaluation. The Foundation Programme in its current form is redundant with the introduction of the new set of standards for initial education and training of pharmacists published by the General Pharmaceutical Council. Nonetheless, the evaluation study yielded valuable insight into some important considerations for post-registration programme for early career pharmacists. We provide a series of points for consideration when rolling out future post-registration pharmacy training.