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Staff perceptions of e-learning for teaching delivery in healthcare.

Presenter

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Background: E-learning methods are increasingly used in higher education to support learning in healthcare subjects. Significant funds are invested locally into e-learning. Although new technologies are central to teaching and learning strategies, they are not currently accepted universally by academic staff. Further, published studies evaluating perceptions of staff towards e-learning specifically in healthcare are limited.

Aim: The aim of the study was to determine the attitudes towards and use of e-learning amongst academic staff in nursing and midwifery, where new e-learning strategy is being implemented.

Methods: Ethical approval was granted by the local Ethics Committee. An anonymous questionnaire survey was completed by teaching staff to determine their opinions towards and use of e-learning in teaching, available in both electronic and paper format. The questionnaire consisted of items relating to perceived level of computer competence, attitudes towards and individual applications of e-learning in various modalities. Items were mostly closed questions with opportunity for free text responses. Descriptive analysis was conducted using SPSS Version 15.0.

Results: Of 102 responses (40% of population), 60 were completed online and 42 were completed using the paper version returned in the internal mail. Responders often had strong views on the subject and gave additional free text answers. Level of computing expertise varied although twice as many staff described themselves as 'novice' than as 'competent'. Use of e-learning ranged from never (19.6%), 2-3 times per year (33.3%), monthly (22.5%), weekly (18.6%), and daily (5.9%). Opinions were divergent with most staff acknowledging the benefits of e-learning and a large proportion reporting that e-learning methods would particularly help students who require flexibility for learning whilst out in practice. Staff recognised the pedagogical value of e-learning methods in meeting different learning preferences. However, many expressed concerns over barriers such as lack of time, resources or technical support, 'cost-benefit' of e-learning developments, and issues relating to the appropriateness of e-learning methods for practice subjects. Staff did not fully utilise the range of technologies available and there was evidence of low confidence in the use of e-learning in a proportion of this sample.

Conclusion and Implications: These findings are limited to teaching staff who responded to the questionnaire. However, they highlight that many staff exhibit positive attitudes towards technology in teaching and learning particularly through blended approaches to learning. Nevertheless, barriers exist that may be partially addressed through better understanding of e-learning tools and their potential application, and additional support and resources. E-learning strategies need to focus on improving staff awareness of using e-learning methods to supplement rather than replace traditional technological training and incentives for staff involvement. Future study might consider staff training needs, the impact of technological training initiatives on perceptions of e-learning, and investigate the implications of e-learning for different subject disciplines. Comparison of staff attitudes between disciplines might identify those barriers that are common across subjects and those which are specific to healthcare.