

A COURSEWORK ALTERNATIVE TO WORK PLACEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

In medical science education, work placements are highly valued, yet have notable limitations:

1. Students' individual experiences vary significantly;
2. Students acquire deep knowledge of only one medical science profession;
3. Placement co-ordinators are challenged to find increasing numbers of positions, with the 'personal flavour' approach clearly unsustainable.

Our alternative coursework approach overcomes these limitations while giving students a meaningful understanding of work settings. We focus on three elements:

1. Discussions with professionals to make students aware of the diverse opportunities and career paths;
2. Visits to workplaces to let students i) engage with, and freely question, working professionals on their home ground; ii) participate in relevant hands-on activities; and iii) build an opinion on their own suitability for certain careers;
3. An in-depth interview with a research/medical professional to give students real insight into specific careers, reinforce their confidence in approaching potential supervisors/employers, and even create opportunities for postgraduate study (two 2010 students are studying Honours with their interviewed researchers).

Evaluation shows this approach-- highly transferable to other disciplines--helps students make highly informed choices regarding future studies/careers, and builds stronger relationships between universities and relevant professional communities than one student/one workplace models.

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