A COURSEWORK ALTERNATIVE TO WORK PLACEMENTS

Isabelle Ferru (isabelle.ferru@anu.edu.au)

Research School of Biology, Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200, Australia

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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.