Investigating Student Paramedic Professional Identity

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INTRODUCTION

Little research has been conducted on the topic of paramedic identity; an identified weakness for a profession on the brink of professionalisation (O’Meara, 2011). The purpose of this study was to investigate self-reported levels of paramedic student professional identity (PI). PI evolves during one’s education and it is most susceptible to influence during the first year of study (Cook, Gilmer, & Bess, 2003). This study also explored the specific factors that may contribute to PI development in first year paramedic students.

METHOD

Participants

- First year CSU paramedic students at Port Macquarie Campus (n=51)

Study design

- Repeated measures study with pre and post data collected using a survey instrument

Data collection

- 14 question survey instrument designed to measure demographic data, inquire about influences on professional identity and a 5 point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) with Macleod Clark’s 9-item Professional Identity Scale (MCPIS-9)

Data analysis

- Appropriate statistical tests and descriptive were used to determine differences in responses between pre and post measures in the survey data

RESULTS

- Of the 55 students eligible, n=51 participated in Survey One (93% response rate), with n=46 of 53 in Survey Two (87% response rate).
- There was a trend towards increasing agreement or disagreement depending upon wording of the question
- The most significant finding was a 27.14% increase in respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I feel like I am a member of this profession” after one semester of university
- The majority of students agreed that wearing a uniform, interacting with lecturers, attending a community placement, and participating in simulations and paramedicine focused subjects made them feel part of the profession.

DISCUSSION

Our results highlight how paramedic student professional identity (PI) is influenced during their first session at university. Cook, Gilmer, & Bess (2003) found that PI in student nurses was already beginning to develop prior to university and continued during their studies. Our key findings point to the factors that may impact PI development including the positive influence of wearing a student uniform, interacting with paramedic lecturers, and attending both clinical subjects and community placements. This is consistent with Adams, Hean, Sturgis, & Clark (2006) who noted that interaction with practicing professionals who serve as role models helps to shape the interpersonal dimension of PI. In addition to providing an opportunity to bridge the gap between clinical theory and practice, professional socialisation begins during student community placements, thus influencing the development of student PI. Based on our results, we believe wearing a paramedic uniform on placement and during clinical practicals is important in the formation of paramedic student PI.

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Factors Associated with Increasing Student PI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of those who either ‘Agreed’ or ‘Strongly Agreed’</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactions with Paramedic Lecturers (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying Intro to Paramedic Practice (95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending Placement (87%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in Simulation Scenarios (87%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wearing Student Paramedic Uniform (87%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Studying ‘Paramedic Community Internship’ (93%)</td>
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Q1: I feel like I am a member of the paramedic profession

Survey 1

- Agree or strongly agree: 44%
- Neither agree or disagree: 42%
- Disagree or strongly disagree: 14%

Survey 2

- Agree or strongly agree: 72%
- Neither agree or disagree: 24%
- Disagree or strongly disagree: 4%