

Supporting Operating Department Practice students

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What is Operating Department Practice?

An Operating Department Practitioner (ODP) works alongside other health professionals in the operating theatre, as well as playing a part in preoperative and postoperative care. They are involved in assessing the patient prior to surgery, in preparing the theatre and its equipment, and in the theatre itself, assisting surgeons (Association of Operating Department Practitioners, 2005).

I find it difficult to discern the boundary between the work of an ODP and the work of perioperative nurses. I have been reassured to see that academics observing the field find the same (Timmons & Tanner, 2004).

The ODP course in Leicester

Until recently, trainee ODPs undertook NVQs. Now, they take a two year course leading to a Diploma in Higher Education. The course is made up of classroom based study blocks, and practice based blocks. Many of our students undertake their practice blocks in Leicester, but there are also plenty in other places including Boston (Lincolnshire, not Massachusetts!), Kettering, Northampton and Northampton.

Leicester's first intake was in September 2003. The diploma is taught by the Centre for Operating Department Practice, part of the NHS, based at the Leicester Royal Infirmary, but is validated by the University of Leicester. There are more details of the course at <http://www.sttcplayyourpart.nhs.uk/>. The students are almost all NHS employees (I have met one or two in private practice) but are also treated as University undergraduates.

There are two cohorts a year, starting in September and May. The two cohorts this year have had around 30 students each. There is a range of ages within an intake, with some students straight from school and others with considerable work experience. This leads to a range of computer and life experience within one group, although it is too easy to generalise about this. I have met "young" students who are less familiar with IT than some of their older colleagues.

The students are entitled to use the Clinical Sciences Library (we are open to University members, and also to NHS staff based in Leicestershire). Their dual status entitles them to access to University and NHS electronic resources. The electronic resources are potentially very useful, as the practice blocks may mean that the student is away from Leicester for weeks at a time.

The course is grounded in evidence based practice, and so there is a requirement to use the literature and to appraise it. ODPs are also about to

become a regulated profession, regulated by the Health Professions Council (Health Professions Council, 2005). This will presumably lead to CPD requirements.

Information literacy teaching

The diploma course started just before I joined the University, but I have had an involvement with every cohort, being the sole library contact for every one of those cohorts except the very first one. Here I describe the sessions run with the first year students. I have experimented a bit with the format and number of sessions, but I used this pattern with the most recent intake and it seems to work well:

Session 1: introduction to the library, tour, and registration for passwords.

Session 2: literature searching

I have tried covering all this content in one session, but that is too much for the students to take in. Two separate sessions are better, and the Centre has been helpful in accommodating two sessions in the students' timetable.

Here are the sessions in more detail:

Session 1

The students do a "library trail", a self-guided tour that takes them round the library and asks them to find or find out certain things. We use a trail with our undergraduate medical students, and have started to use it with other groups also. I hope it is a bit more interesting than the standard tour, and it saves them listening to my jokes! The students do the trail in pairs, which gets them interacting with each other (they have not known each other for long at this point). It also gives them a bit of credit for being adults. I then go through the answers for the trail, but on the one occasion so far that I have used it, there have been no problems.

Undergraduate students at Leicester register themselves for computer access. In the past we have had ODP cohorts who have not managed to do this, and this was only discovered when it turned out that this was the reason they were not using electronic resources. Because they are away from the library for their teaching blocks, and because electronic resources can be very helpful to them, I decided to spend some of the first session making sure they registered for University computer access, University Athens username, and NHS Athens username. The advantage with this is that they do it, the disadvantage is that they end up with three usernames that they may not use until session 2, and they get confused as to what each one does. I do try to explain it all, but feel I have not hit upon the right way to explain this quite yet. We are about to change to Athens DA, which will reduce the number of usernames by one, and in September this year the two sessions are only a week apart.

Session 2

We look at searching for journal articles, using a database like Medline. Developing this session has raised some interesting questions.

The first is which database to use. I think the first session used Medline (others planned this session and I delivered it) as we had based their teaching material on medical material. I wanted to move away from that as I saw more similarities with nursing students I have worked with in the past. So I tried using the British Nursing Index (BNI). BNI has a simple thesaurus, so you can avoid discussions of exploding terms and the like. In the most recent session, however, I returned to using Medline, as it includes a wider range of literature.

The second question is whether to teach using NHS or University resources. Only the NHS gives us access to BNI, although the University and the NHS both have access to Medline, through different routes. I have decided that since most of the students will have continuing access to Core Content after they finish their course, and since they seem to see themselves as more NHS and less University, I will teach using Core Content resources, but also showing them the University's online journals, which are available through an open URL resolver.

Then there is the question of what subject matter to include. We teach the undergraduate medical students about MeSH, as well as about free text searching. The first ODP sessions followed this model, but I became aware that the thesaurus caused the ODP students more problems than it did for the medics. (Colleagues report the same with other non-medical groups). Most recently I have virtually dropped the thesaurus searching, saving it for the second year sessions, and decided to concentrate on a few key things, which are:

- Don't type in your assignment question as your search question!
- Identify search keywords and put them in separately, or, at if you do put them in together, combine them with Boolean operators.
- Think of synonyms – especially if you don't find anything!
- How to find full text
- Our ODP portal (see below)

I see the students again in their second year, to coincide with a module they are taught on critical appraisal, and I plan to save the thesaurus till then.

Web portal

Leicester has bought Sirsi's Rooms content management software. We piloted five subject portals earlier this year. Subsequently I built an Operating Department Practice Room to bring together all the resources the students would need. The Centre have been very enthusiastic about the Room and suggested other resources to put in it. The Room is at http://rooms1.library.le.ac.uk/rooms/portal/media-type/html/user/anon/page/Leic_odp

The lessons for me

Firstly, that different student groups are not medical students. I knew this, really, having worked with nursing and physiotherapy students in the past. But I think I had become settled in what I thought of as “the Leicester” way of doing things, and was trying to use that way with everyone. I have learnt to customise the content to suit an individual group.

Then, not to cover too much in a session. It’s easy to only see “the material”, and think that you have done your job when all the material has been taught. Every teaching course tells you not to do this, and I can now appreciate why! It’s better, of course, to see the student and what you want them to have learnt by the end of the session. These students have to use journal literature in their assignments, and so what they need to learn is how to find it. I am not sure they need to know how to find all there is on a subject.

ODP students are very new to our library, and, perhaps, to yours, if you have them. Working with a new group raises all sorts of interesting questions. I am not aware that we see any qualified ODPs in the library. Perhaps this is something to work on, but the most recent cohort, especially, has contained some enthusiastic library users, and so perhaps this will begin to change.

You will find a list of useful websites in my Internet sites of interest column for September 2005 (Nockels, 2005). The sites there will give you more information, and may be useful if you yourself are teaching or planning to teach ODPs. This is a shameless piece of self-citation, for which I hope I may be forgiven.

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August 2005

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