

## Teachers' Role as Guidance in Nursing Internship Practical Training

Lasse Tervajärvi<sup>1\*</sup> and Tuula-Maria Rintala<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Senior Lecturer, Tampere University of Applied Sciences, Finland

<sup>2</sup>Principal Lecturer, Tampere University of Applied Sciences, Finland

**\*Corresponding Author:** Lasse Tervajärvi, Senior Lecturer, Tampere University of Applied Sciences, Finland.

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### Abstract

**Background:** Healthcare training includes supervised practical training regulated by an EU directive. The internship allows the student to become acquainted with future work tasks under supervision. The internship gives the student the opportunity to utilize and apply the theory he or she has learned in practical work. One important element of the internship is the student's reflective reflection on one's skills. The guiding teacher often plays an important role in the success of the reflection.

**Methods:** This study was carried out by sending a questionnaire to nursing teachers in universities of applied sciences and upper secondary schools. The questionnaire was sent to the open network of nursing teachers and answering it was voluntary. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions to find out how teachers see the role of the guiding teacher during the practical training. The responses were analyzed by content analysis.

**Results:** In their answers, teachers emphasize cooperation with the actors in the internship. They felt it was important they could support the instructors and help solve problems concerning the student. Teachers also point out that they play a role in initiating students' reflective reflection.

**Conclusion:** The role of teachers in guiding practice is important in many ways; they are responsible for co-operation between different actors and for supervising the realization of the student's goals. In addition, the teacher knows the students and can help them and the instructor in problematic situations.

**Keywords:** *Clinical Training; Nurse Education; Supervising Teacher*

### Introduction

An essential part of the studies of health students, with the scope of qualifications being 75 - 135 ECTS, depending on the education, includes practical training. The internship included in the degree is defined by the University of Applied Sciences Act 932/2014 [1] and is also regulated by the European Union Directive 2005/36/ EC [2] with regard to nursing education. The aim of the internship is to acquaint the student with the work tasks that are important for professional competence. In order to have the opportunity to achieve expertise in one's field, the student needs practical training. In health education, the purpose of practical training is to provide an authentic and safe learning environment in which students can utilize and apply the theoretical knowledge they have learned. In terms of learning, it is important for the students to take responsibility for the development of their competence and professional growth, as well as to reflect on learning on the basis of competence objectives [3,4].

Good guidance in a practical internship does not only mean supporting and guiding the student in the internship. It promotes the student's critical thinking and reflection skills and opens the way for mutual feedback [5]. At its best, supervision deepens what has been

learned, combines theory and practice, and gives the student capability for future working life. Quality guidance is also important in the co-operation between education and working life and in the placement of students in working life [4].

The supervision skills and guidance characteristics of practical training instructors have been investigated in many studies. Key areas of expertise are creating a reflective mentoring relationship, supporting the student's learning process, giving and receiving feedback and implementing student-centered assessment [6-8]. Instructor characteristics, such as the instructor's personal traits and roles, as well as guidance motivation, are also described as important in training supervision [8-10]. Supervision skills should be developed especially in the knowledge of the unit's guiding methods and in the student's goal-oriented guidance and assessment. In a good guiding relationship, both parties reflect on their own and each other's actions, give feedback to each other and develop their activities [5,11]. Instructor training has been found to promote instructors' guidance skills in all areas of competence [10,12,13]. In practical internship, one factor that makes learning difficult is the lack of interaction between the student and the instructor. This is especially emphasized in challenging student guidance situations [12]. Inadequate interaction raises the threshold for giving feedback to both the student and the internship instructor. In order for the feedback provided by the instructor to be as useful as possible for the student, the instructor should be aware of the benefits of giving feedback and provide the student with continuous feedback throughout the internship period. In addition, internship instructors and training providers should be committed to consistent assessment and feedback practices [14]. The instructor also needs critical feedback from the student if there are problems in the supervision relationship [10,12,15].

In order for the practical training to be guided in the best possible way, the activity of the training providers and teachers during the training period is also required. Both the instructor and the student need the support of a teacher. It is important for the student that the teacher has up-to-date information about the different internships so that the teacher can direct the student to the most suitable place. The instructor, on the other hand, needs the teacher's support in for example assessment and feedback practices [9,12]. The teacher should ensure that the instructor has clear information about the objectives of the internship so that they can be achieved.

The role of the teacher in relation to practical training has been in transition over the years. Currently, the teacher is more a creator of the conditions and framework for the internship than a participant in practical nursing [4,15]. However, the presence of a teacher is needed as both the students and the instructors consider the presence of a teacher to be significant. In the Saarikoski, *et al.* study [16], students evaluated the role of the teacher in the supervision of the internship positively and the teacher's participation in the final evaluation was considered important. The students were particularly pleased that the meetings with the teacher focused on the student's learning needs. Instructors also feel that teacher's participation is important; especially in challenging student guidance situations, instructors need support and teacher's participation in supervision [12].

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to elucidate the role of teachers in clinical practice as described by teachers. In addition, the purpose was to find out the teachers' perceptions of the development of the teacher's role in the supervision of clinical practice.

### Methods

The research material was collected on March 10<sup>th</sup> - April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021 with an electronic questionnaire (Microsoft Office 365 Forms) in the Nursing Teachers Facebook group. Because we acquired our research material via social media, a research permit was not required from the ethical committee. The study was publicized and a link to the questionnaire was posted on the group forum. Responding to the questionnaire was voluntary and anonymous, while answering the questionnaire meant consent to participate in the study. The questionnaire had one background question. No more background information was collected from the teachers because it was not necessary for our study. In addition to the background question, the questionnaire included seven open-ended questions that were analyzed using content analysis. In the open-ended questions teachers were asked for example about how much time they have for student during practical training or how they see the role of teacher during practical training. The questionnaire was answered by 34 teachers: 13 teachers from upper secondary schools and 21 from universities of applied sciences.

### Results

#### Teacher's time for clinical practice guidance

As a rule, the teacher of the specific vocational field of the clinical practice in question is responsible for supervising the internship. In some cases, the responsibility lies with the clinic or tutor teacher. The responses revealed that the time spent for mentoring internships varies greatly both between and within institutions. For example, in some institutions, the allotted time for internships per student per week varies from 25 minutes to an hour. In some educational institutions, on the other hand, the number of training hours is always the

same, for example 2.5 hours, regardless of the length of the training. As a result, there may be a minimum of 15 minutes per week left for supervising. However, more than half (63%) of the study participants responded that the allotted time for guidance is more than 25 minutes per week. Based on the answers, the allocated time for guidance on average 25 - 30 minutes per week in polytechnics, while there is a little more flexibility in guidance times in upper secondary vocational education and training.

It appears from the answers of the participants in the study that not all educational institutions have separated the time devoted to the supervision of the internship from the total number of hours of the course. In this case, the amount of allocated time for supervision may depend on the stage of the studies and the teacher has the opportunity for additional resources if necessary.

“Depends on practice, more at the beginning of studies, difficult to define h/week. We are defined by ECTS”.

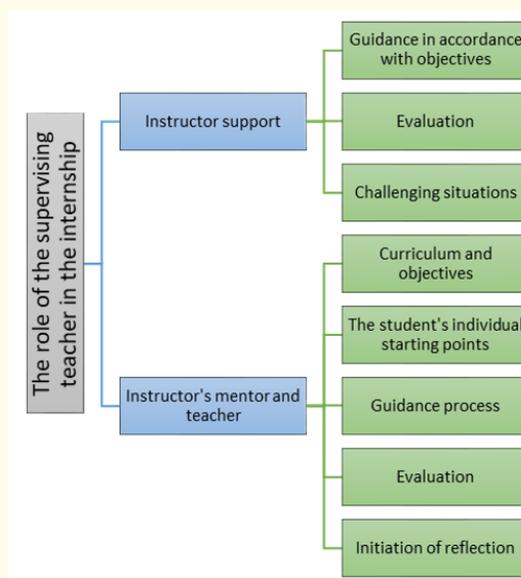
**Cooperation and the role of the teacher in the internship**

Teachers' responses show that there are large differences in interactions between internships between different educational institutions. In some educational institutions, there is very little co-operation and the supervising teachers have little contact with the representatives of the internships. Some respondents highlight forms of collaboration where students are not present, such as collaboration meetings or instructor training. However, the most common responses concerning cooperation tell about student assessment and the mentoring process

<b>Forms of Cooperation</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor training</li> <li>• Cooperation meetings, discussion events</li> <li>• Participation in the steering process</li> <li>• Communication of the individual teacher with the guidance unit, also outside the internship.</li> </ul>	

**Table 1:** Forms of cooperation.

The answers show that the importance of teachers for internships varies from one educational institution to another. If the institution and teachers work closely with the internship, the importance is felt to be more important than in places where there is little co-operation. In the answers, the supervising teacher is described as the supporter, mentor and trainer of the instructor of the internship. The teacher should assist the instructor in guiding and evaluating the student's internship goals and act as a support in challenging situations. In addition, the teacher should familiarize the instructor with the content of the degree program, the student's knowledge and skills, the progress of the supervision process, and provide tools to support the student's own reflection.



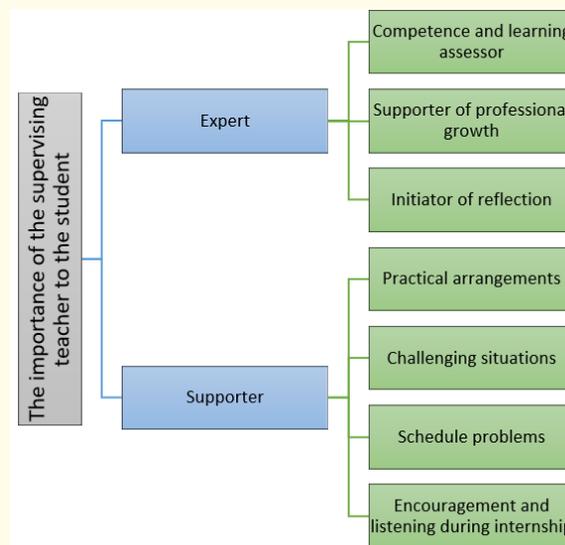
**Graph 1:** The role of the teacher in the internship.

**Perspectives on the importance of the supervising teacher to the student**

Most teachers emphasize the importance of the supervising teacher to the student, although at times the teacher's role may remain very small. The answers show that students and internships can be different, which is also reflected in the need for a supervising teacher.

Most teachers emphasize that the most important role of the supervising teacher is to support the student. Respondents highlight how the role of the supervising teacher is emphasized, especially in challenging situations. The teacher must support the student in disagreements between, for example, the student and the supervising nurse, so that the internship is as successful as possible. In addition, the answers show how important it is for the teacher to encourage and listen to the student during the internship in general, even if the actual problem situations do not appear in the student's internship. A few teachers also point out that the teacher must also support the student in practical arrangements and scheduling problems. Some students need help submitting the right documents or substituting for sick leave.

Teachers' responses also address the role of the teacher as an expert. The role of the teacher is to be a supporter of the student's professional growth, supporting the student's competence and learning. The teacher should bring insights into the practice and its progress based on his or her own substance knowledge and pedagogical skills. In addition, the teacher must be an assessor of competence and learning. For example, there may be large differences in the assessment of internships, the leveling of which requires the teacher's vision to make the assessment consistent across all students. Some respondents also point out the role of the teacher as an initiator for reflection. The teacher should support and assist the student in the development and reflection of critical thinking.



**Graph 2:** The importance of the supervising teacher to the student.

**Ideas for developing the role of the teacher**

In their responses, teachers brought up many issues where internship guidance could be developed. The most common development idea was about resources. Most of the teachers hoped that more time would be set aside to guide the internships. Teachers feel that the current resources are not enough for example to meet every student, in which case the student might not feel heard. There was also a desire in the resources that there would be more supervising teachers so that one teacher would not have too many students to accumulate, and that the supervising teacher would only guide the training of their own specific vocational field skills.

Developing the role of the teacher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adding resources</li> <li>• A closer relationship between theoretical studies and practice</li> <li>• Supervising teacher's working life periods</li> <li>• Better use of remote connections.</li> </ul>

**Table 2:** *Developing the roles of the teacher.*

"The feeling of being encountered by a student and a tutor is most important. It takes time and resources".

Another frequently mentioned area of development dealt with increasing the interactivity of theoretical studies and practical training. This means that it would be important for the teacher to ensure that the internships have sufficient information about the objectives of the internship and what has been covered in the studies. A couple of respondents would like the supervising teachers to walk on the field during the students' internship, when guidance could be given together with the instructor. This is also accompanied by the desire expressed by a few teachers for periods of working life for supervising teachers to ensure that they themselves have sufficient up-to-date practical knowledge of the internships they supervise.

One of the development ideas from the answers is to make better use of remote access. Although teaching remotely is common in the present day, only a few have used it in clinical practice in the past, except for phone calls or emails. Indeed, one respondent states that tele meetings free up more time for the teacher to supervise and meet students and instructors, when for example travelling does not take time.

## Discussion

Previous studies [16] and quality standards for universities of applied sciences<sup>4</sup> bring up and list the teacher's tasks related to clinical practice. This study investigated how teachers describe the role of the teacher in clinical practice for both the student and the internship site. According to the results, the teacher is the supporter and the mentor/trainer of the instructor in the internships. In previous studies, the teacher's support for the instructor, for example in challenging supervision situations, is also perceived as important by the instructors [17]. The importance of instructor training [7,9,12] in the development of instructor knowledge and skills has also been perceived as a significant issue, and in this study, it has also been described as a form of collaboration.

The teacher was also described as supporting the student in different situations during the internship and as an expert who is a supporter of professional growth and a initiator of reflection on learning [10,18]. The importance of the teacher to the student in challenging internship situations and as an incentive for the student was also highlighted [12]. The importance of the teacher is especially evident in the various stages of the student's learning process, which is also assessed relevant by the students [16]. Teachers also described tasks that do not directly appear to the student as guidance, but are related to the student's internship period, for example, practical arrangements for the internship period.

The aim is to develop the teacher's role in practical training. In addition to the desire for more resources for guidance, there is also a desire to make the dialogue between theory and practice more diverse and active. Wider use of group guidance was also highlighted. Group counseling can target resources sensibly to several students at the same time and allows students to reflect on what they have learned with peers [19]. The development of supervising by remote access was also mentioned [20].

In 2020, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health [21] has proposed a measure to develop common national recommendations based on the quality recommendations of ValOpe, university of applied sciences and upper secondary education internship guidance, which

are suitable for use by all social and health care units and provide evaluation information on internship quality and effectiveness. The challenge now is that each party has drawn up its own recommendations almost independently of each other, and monitoring data is also collected on the basis of its own standards. There is a real need for cooperation and joint standards as the results of this study show. In this study, several different forms of collaboration were described, mentor training, co-operation negotiations and participation in the various stages of the mentoring process, as well as individual contacts. However, there were many differences between institutions and teachers. There is a need to develop co-operation more systematically at the national level [22].

In addition to developing common recommendations, there is a need to develop ways of collecting feedback on training. For example, updating the quality survey currently used to collect student feedback to reflect current practices is necessary to provide reliable information on the teacher's role in the internship as well. Not all a teacher's activity is visible to the student and so it is impossible for the student to evaluate. An example of this could be the co-operation between the work unit and the teacher, which takes the form of, for example, instructor training and co-operation negotiations. Similar results were found in the research from Ministry of Social Affairs and Health [21].

### Conclusion

To conclude, the role of teachers in guiding practice is important in many ways. The supervising teachers are responsible for co-operation between different actors and for supervising the realization of the student's goals. In addition, the teacher knows the students and can help them and the instructor in problematic situations. The supervising teacher is needed during the practical training and it is important that supervising teachers in different schools have the same instructions and the resources so that every student get an equal opportunity during his or her practical training.

### Lessons for Practice

- Both the clinic teacher and the student need the support of the supervising teacher.
- The supervising teacher is important because they can provide support both emotionally and practically.
- The supervising teacher should act as initiator of reflection for the student.

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