A survey of the pre-entry occupational health assessment process for undergraduate medical, nursing and midwifery students in England, Scotland and Wales

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ABSTRACT

Background: Pre-employment health assessment (PEHA) in the health service has been studied but there is little work in the UK about the processes used for healthcare students.

Aim: To ascertain the provision of PEHA and the PEHA processes used for undergraduate nursing, midwifery and medical students and to compare the beliefs of the service provider and purchaser (the university/college) about PEHA.

Methods: A postal survey was carried out targeting the providers (the occupational health services) and the purchasers (the university/school/college). Descriptive and non-parametric tests were used for analysis.

Results: The response rates were 82% and 81% from the providers and the purchasers respectively. 96% of courses screened their students- only 1 nursing school and 2 medical schools did not have a pre-entry health screening process other than an enquiry about vaccinations. 74% providers were NHS services and 24% university based services. One provider may serve more than one group of student. All providers use some form of health questionnaires. All students are routinely contacted by 49% of the providers, 21% of providers ask for GPs to verify completed health questionnaires and 21% also obtain a GP medical report for all students. 81% providers have agreed the process with the purchaser and only 9% have never evaluated their procedure. There are differences in opinion between the purchasers and the providers as well as within the two groups about pre-entry health assessments.

Conclusion: Other than the use of a health questionnaire, there is no single accepted PEHA process. The varying opinions between and within the providers and the purchasers imply that both parties need to be clearer about the aims and boundaries of PEHA for these students. A checklist of the main issues to consider when commissioning or reviewing a PEHA is suggested.