Case study 3 University South Australia—Bounce back

Description

Our objective was to enhance resilience by presenting students with challenging situations and asking them to reflect on their own reactions. Students were provided with additional strategies to improve their ability to cope with these situations if they were to occur again in the future.

A course-specific module was implemented within a short course as a summative assessment piece which involved initial reflective posting and subsequent peer discussion. Overall, the response to the module has been very positive with students relating to back to their experiences in clinical practice.

Key features of this case study

- online module with four different scenarios
- use of one specific scenario, relevant to breast ultrasound students, as a summative assessment piece
- peer sharing and reflective comments
- direct application of learning into clinical practice

Context

- adult learners, external delivery mode
- postgraduate Medical Sonography programs and Graduate Certificate in Breast Ultrasound
- University of South Australia
- class size: 20

The need for resilience

In the context of learning and functioning at a high level in an everchanging world, resilience enables students to sustain motivation and focus when faced with difficult tasks. Resilience is not innate but rather involves ways of thinking and acting that can be learnt and developed in all students. Examples are accepting change, taking decisive action, nurturing a positive view, keeping things in perspective and taking care of oneself.

The enhancing resilience strategy

An online module was developed with a team of colleagues from within the School of Health Sciences. One of the key cases given to students to reflect on is that of a trainee sonographer having to cope with a situation where her patient is diagnosed with breast cancer and breaks down on hearing the bad news. Options are then presented to the student to help reflect on their own reaction.
The summative assessment piece considers their answers to the following questions, and subsequent peer sharing.

- What would be your reaction/response in such a scenario. Why?
- How do you think your approach can be improved?
- Have you in your experience as a breast sonographer had a similar challenging situation? Please put up your comments up for discussion.
- Has this activity helped you reflect on your resilience in clinical practice?

**Impact of resilience enhancing activities**

The question was asked, ‘has this activity helped you reflect on your resilience in clinical practice?’. Below are three responses indicating how resilience training has provided opportunities for improvement in the clinical practices of staff and students.

**Quote 1:** “I scored 54 in [the] ‘How Resilient Are You?’ quiz. In the second quiz my result was ‘you are quite resilient!’ Yes, this activity has helped me reflect on my clinical resilience. I do tend to take my work issues home with me, but I realise that this is not beneficial to my mental well-being. Although I do have a very patient husband who I talk to about daily issues, whilst keeping patient confidentiality. I need to be kinder to myself, believe in myself more and have clear goals for the future.”

**Quote 2:** “I am also in a leadership role at my work and this activity has prompted me to reflect on the level of support and education I offer my team of sonographers. I think I could do better here and will look into some resources I can offer our team.”

**Quote 3:** “I agree that sometimes the patients who are absolutely sure there could be nothing wrong are difficult too. We quite often have women who have been called in for further assessment who believe ‘breast cancer won't happen to me.’ Some even have very obvious palpable lumps that they have not felt. I find these patients often break down after they have spoken to the breast physician and progress to needing a biopsy. By the time they come back into the room these patients can be very emotional and require a lot of extra TLC. Another thing we do is offer them a blanket to help them feel cared for and secure, and always a hand to hold during biopsy.”

**Why it worked**

**Enablers**

- short course,
- small group teaching,
- direct application to clinical practice

**Challenges**

This course has not yet been tried out on a large group.
Moving forward

The plan would be to incorporate more course specific online modules, especially for obstetrics the course.

Advice for others

It is important to evaluate what the needs are—what aspects of resilience are lacking and where in the program the students would benefit the most. If they would benefit at multiple stages, then develop modules accordingly. We began with quite generic modules on how to cope with an unexpected grade, workplace confidence, adverse family situations affecting studies and so on and also included a course-specific module with a direct link to the clinical work our students are undertaking.