Decision precision versus holistic heuristic: insights on on-site selection of student nurses

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RCN International Nursing Research Conference
University of Glasgow 2/4/14
The purpose of the presentation

• Outline the nature and scope of a recent evaluative study of student nurse selection in Scotland

• Briefly outline main findings

• Focus on one key theme: decision precision

• Consider this in relation to current literature and debate on selection of student nurses and midwives
Context

• Scotland’s Recruitment and Retention Delivery Group

• Selection became a focus as we shifted from a recruitment to a selection model, and as attrition of students reduced across the country

• National picture of increasing media attention around poor care, with focus on education as a possible ‘cause’ by some (in media and in politics)

• Drive at national level to be transparent in our selection processes – focus on values-based recruitment

• Where is the evidence of impact on student success, patient experience?
The Research Study

• A national study involving 7 Scottish HEIs. Focussing on OSSPs in terms of efficacy, validity and reliability of interviewing in particular.

• The evaluation was designed principally to achieve explanation through multiple case study methodology. Mixed methods of data collection involving questionnaires and interviews (individual and focus group) were used. Qualitative data obtained from 36 lecturers and 72 students. Qualitative content analysis was used as a primary strategy, followed by more in-depth thematic analysis.
Key challenges

• Achieving participation
• Lack of formal evidence of reliability, validity and impact of selection processes in all but two HEIs
• Not enough time to set up prospective evaluation of psychometrics in terms of validity and reliability in each HEI
• Therefore relying on perceptions primarily
Overview of context and parameters of selection for 7 Scottish HEIs
Analytic model looking at main aspects of selection processes

Figure 1: Analytic model of key OSSP processes and possible related outcomes

1 Discrete elements of OSSPs
   - Consideration of academic qualifications
   - Influence of prior enablement of self selection (prior information; job/person specification; role requirements)
   - Personal statements/Motivational assessment tools
   - Essays
   - Individual selection interview processes
   - Group interview processes (e.g. with scenarios)
   - Numeracy and/or literacy tests
   - Involvement of range of people in selection: academic staff; clinical staff; service users; administration staff

2. Typical combinations
   - Type 1 (to be populated through the data collection with HEIs)
   - Type 2
   - Type 3

3. Proximal outcomes
   - 1. Translation into recommendation (nature and strength of recommendation for each prospective student based on initial outcome of OSSP)
   - 2. Whether selected finally (mitigated by match to available places)

4. Distally related outcomes
   - Retention of students at key stages of programme (e.g. after placement 1)
   - Indicators of progression difficulty (e.g. cause for concern)
   - Satisfaction of students at key stages of programme (e.g. in regard to course and career choice)
   - Other?
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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<td><strong>Adoption, adaptation</strong></td>
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<td>Dynamics on the day</td>
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<td><strong>Decision precision?</strong></td>
<td>Consideration of attributes</td>
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<td>Interviewing team</td>
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<td><strong>Making decisions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Distal dynamics</strong></td>
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<td>Tentative attributions</td>
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Overview of key findings

• All HEIs used criteria that manifestly focused on the characteristics that they saw as important to nursing (e.g. values)
• A lack of good evidence to support particular selection processes but decisions made in good faith and with rationales
• Choices for different processes made for similar reasons - incongruous
• Good practice evidenced – e.g. use of service users and students in selection processes, attempts at objectivity in decision-making
• Deeply felt need of selection staff to meet applicants face to face – individual and organisational assurance/reassurance
• Staff often concerned with holistic consideration of individual applicant, therefore many factors informing final selection decision
• Linking distal outcomes (e.g. retention, progression, satisfaction etc.) to selection processes in terms of cause and effect is problematic
Holism and intuition

• ‘I think we take a holistic approach because you look at what’s written on paper, but even those candidates who don’t maybe do well at interview, you’re not just saying well that’s it, it’s over’ (lecturer)

• ‘We also have a rating on the front there as good, very good and excellent which is probably intuitive plus gathering all the other information, that would be a summary of how we felt. But again it is snapshotty, it is dependent on so many other factors but we do our best, we try and make it as similar, as objective as we can but we understand there’s obviously subjectiveness....’ (lecturer)
Global expert judgement versus scaling/scoring

• ‘We’re all sort of experts in our field, I think we shouldn’t downplay that. I think we’re more than capable of judging people’s ability to care for the kind of people that we want to care for, you know.’

• ‘It feels like it’s (MMI) removed the... “God I really don’t like you!” It’s a way of making sure that you can’t do that because you can only give your score for your little bit so unless you stand up at the end and go “let’s just not have that student because they’re awful”...you can’t influence it in the same way whereas a two person interview you can really influence it.’
Decision precision?

• ‘One thing I really miss about the old style of interviews (pre-MM1) is not being able to ask people why they want to be a nurse and what nursing means to them.’ (clinical interviewer)

• ‘And from looking around, the majority of people who were in my interview ended up getting in. I think it was four out of my interview that got in. So it kind of seemed like they’d seen your personal statement so you’re basically in, they’re just making sure you’re not like a weirdo or something.’ (student)
Summary

Staff participants placed great emphasis on making correct decisions about whether or not candidates should be offered places on programmes. In doing so they typically took into account a range of attributes that they valued in order to achieve a holistic assessment of the candidate as a person. These included: interpersonal skills, team skills, group working, confidence, problem-solving, aptitude for caring, motivations, and commitment to the profession. The holistic heuristic for decision making tended to predominate over belief in the precision of validated measurement tools for particular individual attributes.
Stepping back - key points

• The different approaches used in HEIs need to be understood within their contexts (e.g. pragmatic issues, socioeconomic context, candidate characteristics)
• Variations in definitions and perceptions of the value of particular approaches and attributes, and their relative weighting when making decisions
• Minimum cut-off scores useful but not the whole solution
• “Red flags” in F2F very important – spot the “wierdo”
• Changing external context – evolving rapidly and impacting on selection practice
Conclusion

• While the development of measurement tools for particular attributes such as compassion develop apace, staff are likely to have a felt need to view candidates “in the round”.
References


• Taylor, R; Macduff, C and Stephen, A (2013)