

## The attitudes and perceptions of undergraduate pharmacy students and their preceptors on hybrid placement models

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### Background

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in clinical educators having to adapt to Department of Health guidelines limiting the traditional structure of student experiential placements<sup>1</sup>. Face to face placements were limited to penultimate and final year students, and of these patient interactions were to be minimised. Educators implemented a hybrid placement model including both virtual and onsite components to address the restrictions. Experiential learning through placement is a fundamental component of pharmacy student education as it enables students to integrate theory with clinical practice<sup>2</sup>. Virtual placements provided a unique use of technology to continue the experience of clinical practice. They have enabled students to successfully complete placements, however, are not without challenges.

### Aim

To investigate attitudes and perceptions of students and preceptors to non-traditional placements consisting of an onsite, ambulatory care component and an offsite, virtual component.

### Methods

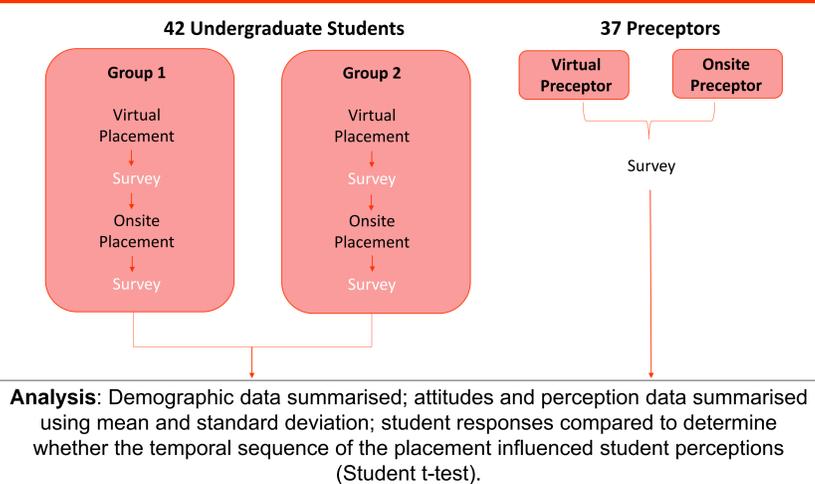


Figure 1. Methodology flowchart

In response to healthcare guidelines, pharmacy educators at Alfred Health developed a novel student placement structure that involved a blended model of **onsite** (dispensary and ward-based) and **virtual** (eg, Medicine Information, Formulary, Medication Safety, Research) placement experiences.

Two surveys were developed, one for students and one for preceptors. Respondents were invited to reflect on a series of statements about their attitudes and perceptions of the placements, using a 7-point Likert scale from 1: 'Strongly Agree' to 7: 'Strongly Disagree'.

Eligible participants were undergraduate students and pharmacist preceptors involved in experiential placements between August and November 2020. Students were invited to complete the survey at the conclusion of both the onsite and virtual components. Preceptors completed the survey at the end of each two-week placement period.

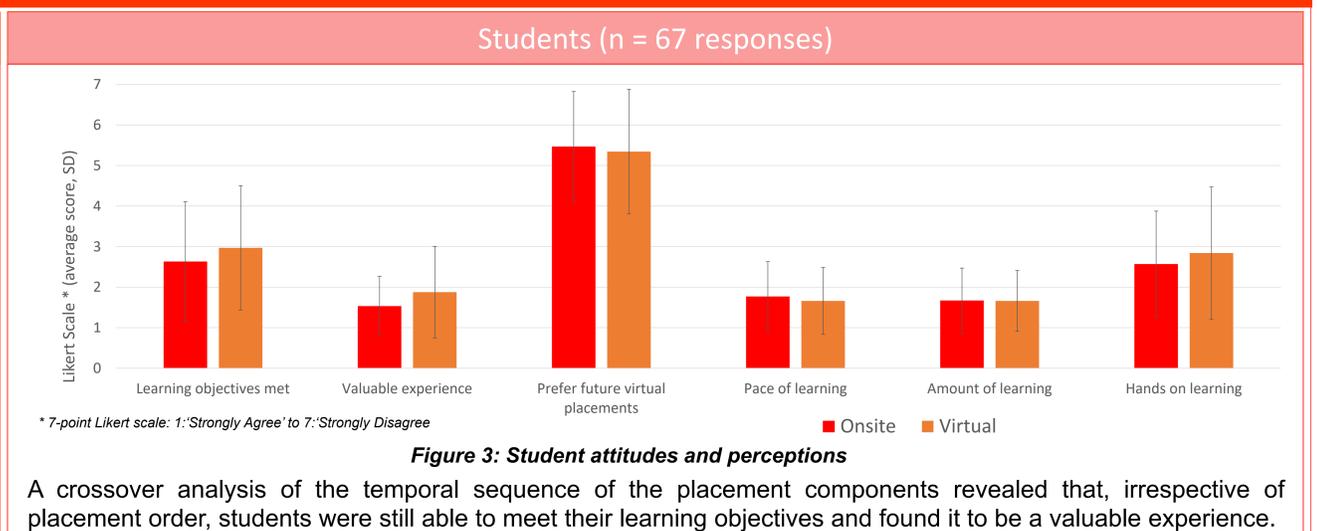
### Results

Preceptors (n = 25 responses)			
Question	Onsite preceptor mean* ± SD	Virtual preceptor mean* ± SD	Mean difference ± SEM
I have seen growth and development in my student	2.3 ± 0.8	1.8 ± 0.7	0.5 ± 0.3
Virtual placements give students an equal opportunity to grow and develop as clinical placements	3.6 ± 1.1	3.3 ± 1.2	0.2 ± 0.5
I am supportive of non-traditional or virtual experience for future placements	3.1 ± 1.5	2.3 ± 0.7	0.8 ± 0.4

\* 7-point Likert scale: 1: 'Strongly Agree' to 7: 'Strongly Disagree'

**Figure 2: Preceptor attitudes and perceptions**

There were no statistically significant differences in perceptions between onsite and virtual preceptors



### Discussion

Experiential placements are a core component of pharmacy education, in order to consolidate and validate university learnings. The findings from this study, identified that students were able to meet learning objectives and apply skills regardless of onsite or virtual aspects of their placements. Irrespective of placement order, students were able to meet their learning objectives and found each component to be a valuable experience. This novel placement model was supported by hospital preceptors, given the growth and development seen in the students.

Consistent with the literature supporting experiential placements as the best model for student learning and engagement, students opposed the shift to an entirely virtual design; instead, they indicated a preference for a blended approach of both virtual and onsite elements<sup>2-4</sup>. While growth and development of students was observed by all preceptors, pharmacy education teams are encouraged to explore more virtual placement activities that mimic real-life scenarios, enabling students to enhance their skills and experiences.

### Conclusion

If a transition to remote learning is required in the future, a hybrid model of virtual and onsite elements is a feasible arrangement in order to meet the learning needs of pharmacy students.

### References

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