

# What to expect on a clinical placement



## INMO student officer **Dara Ann O'Malley** gives new nursing and midwifery students some advice on coping with clinical placements

GOING into the clinical area for the first time can be very scary. Many student nurses and midwives find that they cannot sleep the night before they start their clinical placement. My advice for your first day of clinical placement is to start your day off by eating breakfast. I know it's hard to eat something so early in the morning however many students have fainted on the wards because they skipped breakfast. Nursing and midwifery are physical occupations and you need to keep your energy levels up.

Give yourself plenty of time to travel to the hospital and find the ward you will be working on. It does not make a good first impression to be late on your first day. Don't forget to introduce yourself to the CNM/CMM (clinical nurse/midwife manager). Don't panic when you are in handover at the start of the shift and realise that you haven't a clue what they are talking about. No one expects you to know everything on your first day. Just write down each patient's name, age and the team the patient is under and take it from there.

It is important to be orientated to the ward on the first day so you know where

the fire exists, crash phone and crash trolley are located.

You will have a preceptor (nurse/midwife mentor) assigned to you for your placement. For your first couple of shifts you will probably follow them everywhere. Be friendly, patient and eager to learn and you'll have a good working relationship.

Explain to patients that you are a first-year student as they often can't tell the difference between uniforms and then they won't expect you to know everything about their care.

Never attempt to do something if you are unclear about what has been asked of you. It is better to ask something two or three times than to make a mistake. We are dealing with patients' lives at the end of the day.

Learn to be able to laugh at yourself. The clinical environment can often be a stressful one so a good sense of humour will help you to get through the day. I learned in my first placement in first year, always to leave my mobile phone in my locker because due to an incident where I was bending over a patient's bed to carefully pull out a full bed pan when my mobile phone slipped out of

my uniform pocket into the bed pan.

Learn to develop a thick skin. When you are a student you will get a lot of constructive criticism. Understand that feedback is not personal and that changes may be required.

Bullying should never be tolerated in the clinical area. If you feel like you are not being treated fairly talk to your CPC (clinical placement co-ordinator) or CNM/CMM.

You can learn a lot from the HCA (healthcare assistants) as they know the wards inside out and have very good basic nursing skills.

If a patient asks you a question and you don't know the answer, tell them that you don't know the answer but that you will find out for them. Never give patients information if you are unsure.

If a nurse or midwife asks you to do something and you do not feel that you have enough experience or are not qualified to do it don't be afraid to tell them that it is out of your scope of practice.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all the first-year students good luck on their clinical placements. It is a very exciting and challenging time.