

# FACULTY NEWS



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## Practice Nurses Study Days

**I**T was shortly after joining the Essex Faculty Board as a proud new MRCGP, that I found I had been volunteered to help organize a series of study days for practice nurses.

Essex practice nurses had already shown themselves enthusiastic about further education by forming their own group, which runs monthly evening meetings. We aimed to build on this and offer full day courses with varied programmes. The idea followed a successful series of receptionist study days.

For the first course there was no way of predicting the response we would get, so we circulated our advert to as many nurses as possible. We distributed the advert via the FPC mailing, which is free, and in theory ensures that every practice in Essex receives a copy. To avoid going straight into the practice manager's or GP's bin letters were specifically addressed to 'The Practice Nurse'.

We had hoped for a response of 40 to 50 nurses, but within a couple of weeks of the advertisement going out we were oversubscribed and applications were still rolling in. The only way to cope was to book a second date and run the whole day again. Such reorganization required quite a lot of work since we had to return about 40 of the applications with an invitation to apply for the second day. Eventually we had about 60 nurses attending each course.

The programme included basic topics like common skin problems, preventing heart disease, and one which always inspires discussion — whooping cough vaccination. Half the morning was set aside for small group work using MEQ type questions that were examples of every-day problems which it was hoped would provoke discussion on the different ways of



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dealing with them. After 40 minutes the groups came together for a plenary session and a member of each presented their conclusions on the questions. This was used as a focus for summing up and ironing out any misapprehensions. Our final session was more reflective and on the theme of 'how to handle the difficult customer'.

Before each study day we sent the discussion questions to each participant together with a map showing the position of the hospital and convenient car parks. The programme started at 10 am to allow sufficient time for those coming from a distance. We managed to get sponsorship for the lunch, which was provided on the premises by local caterers, from Smith and Nephew and 3M. They made contributions in return for setting up stands.

The first two study days were so well received that six months later we ran another set. This time we anticipated the numbers, and organized two days from the start. We had another enthusiastic response, with 60 to 65 nurses attending each day. We followed a similar format to

the previous one, starting with a talk on travel vaccinations which was followed by small group discussions. After lunch there were sessions on common ear problems, child abuse and varicose ulcers. Where possible we tried to use GPs as speakers, although we did use a hospital specialist to talk on varicose ulcers.

To summarize, my recipe for a successful study day:

— Allow plenty of time for social contact and small group discussions. For nurses working in relative professional isolation such opportunities for exchanging ideas are most welcome.

— Organize a good lunch and don't forget the tea, coffee and biscuits.

— Mix the programme: bread and butter, topical and new angles on old ideas.

We have decided that in future we should be listening to our practice nurses more and finding out from them what they want in terms of continuing education. The next step, perhaps, should be to encourage them to participate more actively in their own education. We have found organizing a study day for practice nurses rewarding. The nurses come along, they are enthusiastic and want more. We would encourage other faculties to try our recipe. □

**Lesley Clough**

## Correction

**T**HE article on general practice tutors in the May *Faculty News* was incorrect in saying that it was the South West Thames faculty who held the medical education weekend. It should have read the South East Thames faculty. We apologise for any confusion caused. □