

RCN Peer Support Service with the University of Brighton

Reasonable adjustments for students on placements

Case study 2: Liam – depression and anxiety

Nice (2011) suggest that between 4-10% of people will experience major depression in their lifetime and it is recognised that mental health problems are common among students.

Liam had disclosed on his UCAS application form that he had depression which was managed with medication and counselling.

Getting support

At the University

On starting his course, he had made contact with the University support services, and a learning support plan had been produced he applied for the Disabled Students Allowance through Student Finance England. This funding provided 1:1 tutorial support. Academic support from the University was identified in the form of a learning support plan (LSP) that identified reasonable adjustments including modified deadlines for the submission of course work, additional time in all examinations and OSCE,

Liam met with the Disability Liaison Tutor, and his support package was discussed. He declined any additional support for his clinical placements as he felt that it wouldn't be an issue there. He didn't want his placement or his mentors to know that he had depression.

During his first placement, his clinical mentor raised concerns about his time keeping as he was frequently late for the start of his day. Initially, he had said this was due to public transport, but his mentor had felt that was more to it than this. The placement had also noticed that over time he was less engaged with his clients or with the team. The placement team raised concerns with his personal tutor who met with Liam and advised him to seek further support through student services and the Disability Liaison Tutor.

On meeting the DLT, Liam described how his mood had started to dip soon after starting the course. He said that the first weeks had been fine and he had made a lot of friends. He had taken a break from his counselling because he had felt so well and also it had been difficult to keep the appointments due to his university timetable and then going into practice. His counsellor was located at his home location, over 50 miles away from the University. He had not got around to registering with a local GP. He thought he was just a bit low because of moving away from home as initially, it hadn't felt like his normal 'depression coming back'. At first, he had just missed a few lecture but hadn't worried as other students did so as well. He was drinking more alcohol than normal just to perk him up a bit, but over the last few weeks that hadn't worked and he had taken to spending a lot of time alone. Liam said he was feeling increasingly tired and often slept through his alarm or woke not feeling able to attend his clinical placements or the University.

Getting more support

The DLT advised that Liam returned to student services for further support and to access the University counselling service. Also, he was advised to register with the campus-based Doctors Surgery and enquire about re-engaging with counselling with a local counsellor. Information regarding local support groups within the town was given. Liam followed this advice, and an updated LSP was produced. Liam agreed to having an LSP-Practice and for this to be within his assessment of practice documentation.

In clinical placements

Liam met with his personal tutor and the Disability Liaison Tutor and based on his LSP, a learning support plan was identified. The learning support plan was discussed with the practice education facilitators within the local MH Trust, and they agreed that the adjustments to practice were appropriate.

The learning support plan included

- 1) Liam was struggling with his energy levels and coped better when working 8-hour shifts. It was agreed that he would complete 8-hour shifts with no more than two consecutive shifts at a time.
- 2) Liam would inform the placement of his regular counselling sessions, and his attendance would be planned around these dates.
- 3) Liam was given a total of 5 independent study days during the academic year that he could use to manage his long-term health condition. Before taking a day Liam had to inform his placement mentor and inform the Disability Liaison Tutor who would authorise the day. The placement was asked to provide a consistent named clinical mentor would support Liam to maintain his attendance and give verbal and written feedback as to his progress.
- 4) Liam would follow the process for informing his placement and the University if he was unable to attend

A six-week review date was set, and Liam was encouraged to make an appointment to meet with his mentor before the placement started and to discuss his LSP-Practice.

Review

At the review date, Liam met with the DLT. His attendance in practice had improved considerably, and although he had struggled to attend on occasions, he had not needed to use one of the five independent study days. His mentor had been more supportive and had come up with other suggestions about how Liam could manage his wellbeing. Liam had had regular sessions with the counselling service based at the University and was on a waiting list for counselling through the GP. He had decided not to look into any groups within the town as he was uncertain about how he could manage this especially if he met people who had been in his care.

Outcome

The LSP was maintained, and a further review date was scheduled. The next review would with his personal tutor.