

Real-life story - Emilie Edwards

Read about Emilie's first placement.

Emilie Edwards

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Have the confidence to ask to practise your skills as soon as you feel able.

How did your first placement go?

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Like most students, I had a mix of emotions. I felt excited and nervous, but I was keen to use some of the knowledge I had acquired in the first six weeks of my course. I was also a bit anxious about the relationship with my mentor because I know this can make a huge difference to how you feel on placement.

My first placement was in the community. I spent the first hour or so in the antenatal clinic observing my mentor. Then, as we had previously discussed the skills I felt comfortable with, she observed me doing manual blood pressures, urinalysis, palpations and even taking blood later on in the day.

I was lucky to have a very good mentor who made me feel confident and answered all my questions. She gave me the confidence to try different procedures. At the end of my first day I was excited about going back.

How much support did you get?

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I felt well supported by my mentor on this placement and also by my university link lecturer, who is always very easy to contact. Some of the other midwives on the team weren't quite so welcoming and that was quite hard. I suppose it is always difficult to integrate a new colleague and even more so a passing student. There seems to be quite a bit of variability when it comes to mentors and the quality of the teaching they pass on to future midwives.

I have to say, I personally felt very lucky.

What was the best part of your placement?

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My placement was in a group practice. This system, which is now disappearing, means that the group of midwives I was with follow their clients through the entire antenatal period, get called onto the labour ward for the birth and then provide home visits for mother and baby in the postnatal period. I really enjoyed being able to experience all of these different stages.

I had made the choice to mirror my mentor's shifts, including attending on-call night duties. After a full-on first day, I went home and was called out at 8pm because one of our clients was in labour. I left the hospital the next morning having witnessed my first birth.

If you don't have commitments and you can be flexible I recommend taking any opportunity to be with your mentor and to maximise the experiences open to you. You'll see something of the reality of the demands of the job and, remember, this counts towards the placement hours you have to complete.

And your least favourite part?

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I think the most difficult thing for me was sitting in the office, while the midwives were doing paperwork and not really having any set task to do. I tried to use the time productively to do some reading.

What tips do you have for others?

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Go with a positive and confident attitude. Focus on a couple of skills you are confident you can do well, to give your mentor confidence in you.

Take a small notebook that you can slip in your pocket where you can record important bits of information and your experiences and keep on top of writing up your paperwork every evening otherwise it can get out of hand. Being organised, or learning to be, is very important

Have the confidence to ask to practise your skills as soon as you feel able. The more you practice the better you will get. You might be nervous the first couple of times but it will get better quickly.

Ask questions - there aren't really any silly questions and most mentors will be happy to see that you are interested and trying to improve.

Observe your mentor closely for the first day, for example how they talk to patients, organise themselves and complete tasks. Each mentor will have a different way of doing things and will often expect you to adapt to their way of working. So, just watch, then take a deep breath and go for it!

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