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## Student midwives' experiences of mentoring in clinical practice during the three-midwifery programme

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The concept and practice of mentoring are viewed as important prerequisites of midwifery education. The role of midwife is in statute: to facilitate student learning, provide clinical supervision and assess in clinical practice, this is in order to safe guard the public from students who are not ready to qualify as midwives (NMC, 2008). My work as a senior midwifery lecturer prompted me to undertake this research. I found that contentions for the majority of student midwives were relating to inadequate mentor support, clinical supervision, feedback on their clinical performance and getting their practice assessment book completed during their hospital and community placement. Therefore, I was unclear how effective mentoring is in producing competent midwives, even though several policy documents stress the importance of learning in practice for students who spend fifty per cent of their training in the workplace (ENB and DoH 2001; DoH 2010). Several studies have shown that providing an effective mentoring system for student midwives is challenging for many stakeholders (SCOPE 1998; Begley 2001; Jones et al. 2001; Kroll, et al. 2009; DoH 2010; Hughes and Fraser 2010). The purpose of this study was to examine student midwives' mentoring experience in clinical practice. The need for this is paramount, driven by the requirement to safeguard the public from students who are not ready to qualify as midwives (NMC 2009). The main research question was, 'what are student midwives' impressions of their mentoring experience during their practice placements'? This general question encompasses three dimensions: a) an exploration of students' mentoring experience in the hospital and community, b) examination of the mentor-student relationship, from student midwives' perspectives, and across different clinical contexts and c) identification by student midwives of ways mentors promoted or inhibited their learning. This study explores students' mentoring experience in clinical practice as a teaching and learning strategy to produce competent midwives. Nine students were recruited to this study from five different practice placements; all undertook midwifery training at the same London University. In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain accounts of their mentoring experience. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim, using interpretive and narrative analysis (Langdrige 2007; van Manen 1990). I identified key themes and categories that represented students' mentoring experiences. Four distinctive categories identified from the data were: (1) the mentor student relationship before practice commences, (2) the mentor-student relationship during the experience, (3) the act of providing maternity care and (4) reflecting on the experience. These categories are reflected through two main themes, the mentor-student relationship and the learning experience.

### In conclusion:

- The culture of the National Health Service needs to change, so that all stakeholders see mentoring students as part of the working life of a midwife rather than an extra burden or responsibility.
- Mentors need dedicated time with students to promote effective learning.
- Students need to pay more attention to the information that they are given about mentoring from lecturers in preparation for their practice placements. Students also need to be prepared realistically for their role in clinical practice to help reduce their anxiety.
- Mentors, lecturers, student midwives, practice facilitators and lay people need to work in collaboration to design a user-friendly practice assessment document.

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