

[ORIGINAL ARTICLE]**Internship learning contract in physiotherapy****Prof. Dr. Khatri S.K.(PhD)¹, Mewada V.A.², Rajput V.V.³, Barot K.⁴, Choudhari P⁵**¹Principal, ²Former Intern, ³Assistant professor, ^{4&5}Tutor,¹Maharashtra Institute of Physiotherapy, Latur,²Nootan College of Physiotherapy, Sankalchand Patel University, Visnagar, Gujarat, India - 384 315

Background: A learning contract is an agreement negotiated between student and supervising teacher that gives an information about what you want to learn and how you plan to learn it. The main objective of the present study was to find out if internship learning contract could be beneficial in individualized self directed learning with the instructional support from supervisors in undergraduate physiotherapy program.

Methods: A total of 32 physiotherapy intern students participated in this study. They were requested to complete the questionnaire and discuss with their internship supervisor. After this, intern and supervisor were separately interviewed for their opinion and satisfaction pertaining to this activity.

Results: Almost every participant and supervisor liked the internship learning contract concept and there was significant level of satisfaction amongst interns and their supervisors.

Conclusion: The use of a learning contract during BPT internship may be beneficial in enhancing self directed learning and instructional support.

Keywords: Evaluation, internship, learning contract, physiotherapy, self directed learning, agreement

Introduction:

Physiotherapy education emphasizes the ultimate goal of education i.e. competence efficiency in various aspects meeting the clients care needs. Several studies have shown that current physiotherapy education has numerous deficiencies and shortages and might not meet the learning requirements. A classic learning contract that is often used in higher education is a formal written agreement between the learner and a supervisor which details what is to be learned, the resources and strategies available to assist in learning, what will be produced as evidence of the learning has occurred, how it will be assessed and within what timeframe the learning will take place. Knowles has been appreciated as one of the early users and supporters of learning contracts to encourage adult learners to take more responsibility for their learning.^[1,2] Anderson, Boud, and Sampson (1998) recognized learning contracts as one exemplar of negotiated learning, a program of study that is jointly determined by faculty and student.^[3] Learning contracts can take many forms grossly in terms of structured or unstructured.^[4]

A learning contract is commonly used in fieldwork and practice-based education situations where the focus is on the practical application of self-directed learning. Students can individualize their goals which reflect their strengths and weaknesses.^[5]

Some of the advantages of the learning contract include; learning is of interest, value, or relevance to the learner, motivation of learners is high, freedom to choose the area for learning, learners can learn at their own pace, provides focus, respects differences in individuals, increased confidence and excitement in learning. Additional benefits acknowledged include, the value of creating a real-world context for research methods. The strong mentoring partnership among academics and students, an opportunity for self-directed learning that fosters better accountability, responsibility, commitment, and develops more independence in learning.^[6-10]

The learning contract can be beneficial for students in the entire research process. The learning contract may increase employability skills such as goal setting, negotiation, evaluation of one's work, and acceptance of accountability for outcomes.

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Employers often look for individuals who understand problematic situations and can do something about them.^[11-14]

The learning contract required the intern students to answer questions such as 'what might I do better next time?' or 'how would I do things differently?' These are key phrases in the research process assigned to these students during their internship. It is the ability to effect change that makes the reflective practice so vital to higher education and to the graduates as they progress to the professional world in the future.^[15] Reflection aids in getting us from experience to understanding and some authors explained reflection in the context of learning as a generic term for that intellectual and affective behavior in which individuals engage to explore their experiences that show the way to new understandings and appreciation'. As the physiotherapy intern students worked their way through the learning contract process for their research project they had the opportunity to develop this skills.^[16,17]

Although there is adequate literature on the use of learning contracts in different teaching settings, we felt that there is limited evidence about the utility of this tool amongst physiotherapy interns and hence this study was undertaken to find out if it can help the interns students to add on the self-directed learning beyond the mandatory requirements suggested to by local regulating authorities.

Methods :

Study setting: This study (NCP/IEC/2020/FR/12) was conducted at Nootan College of Physiotherapy, Sankalchand Patel University, Visnagar, India 384 315 during 28 September 2020 to 4 November 2020.

Study design: A qualitative mixed method design using phenomenological approach was used for this study with an aim of generating a description of experiences of participants as phenomenon.^[18]

Study sample: A purposive sample of 32 BPT interns who had completed their four years of study and reported for compulsory Rotatory internship at Nootan College of Physiotherapy and 8 faculty supervisors from various physiotherapy outpatient departments where supervised internship and research project was to be carried out for six months on rotational basis. The sample consisted of 28 females and 12 males with a mean age of 25.5 ± 5.1 years SD. The purposive sample was chosen in this study to get true reflections of the study participants and prevent data pollution and biases.

Participants: The participants included all the physiotherapy interns of the same academic year, who have passed their final year and about to start their compulsory rotator BPT internship as per the academic program requirements and their supervisors.

Ethical consideration:

Institutional ethical permission was obtained and participants were request to sign an informed written consent prior to the study. All the data collection was handled and supervised by (VM, KB) to ensure the confidentiality.

Intervention & procedure:

All the new BPT interns who joined for their compulsory rotatory internship were requested to complete the internship learning contract. Along with basic demographic details, this contract had three basic questions like what are you learning goals, how will you work toward your goals and how will you prove you have met your goals. Further, these participants were asked to specify their inputs pertaining to transferable skills like personal skills, soft skills, professional skills; personal development objectives related to professional aspirations, and career development objectives that they think are required to be successful in that field in future. Intern participants were encouraged to discuss these inputs with their supervisors before signing and submitting the same to investigators. A photocopy of the same was provided to them for their reference. After completion of this written document an online questionnaire (designed by SK) was filled by the interns and their supervisors and then an individual audio interview was conducted (VM & KB) to explore more information about the same.

Analysis:

These internship learning contracts, completed questionnaires and audio interviews were analyzed further by investigator (VR & PC) and inductive qualitative analysis approach was used for this purpose.

Results:

A total of 40 BPT interns and faculty supervisors participated in this study, out of this 32 were BPT interns and 8 were faculty supervisors. Among them 80 % were female and 20 % were male participants. Analysis of the internship learning contract demonstrated the following four common themes by participants as self evaluation, improve communication skills, achieve self development and

update professional skills & research.

Good learning tool: Through the Google form questionnaire and audio interview, participants were asked if they think internship learning contract is a good tool and if they liked the concept of internship learning contract before the commencement of BPT internship. Response to this question included a total of 97% participants opined that internship learning contract is a good tool and 3 % opined that they can't say anything about this tool.

What is good about internship learning contract: Most of the participants thought it was a kind of useful tool for the BPT interns and make their and supervisor's job easy. One participant expressed that 'This may help the students to focus and learn more in detail about their own skills and it will become easy for the tutors to teach. Communication and learning becomes easy for future'.

What kind of difficulties will be there in introducing the ILC concept at NCP: While most of these participants expressed that there won't be much difficulty in introducing internship learning concept at NCP, one participant thought that theoretical framework and understanding or awareness is necessary for this tool? In the participants word 'I personally tried these points practically as per learning contract with interns and found that response was good and students participated actively with interest when their theoretical concept was clear about the same'. Another participant expressed 'In my opinion, every student have different goals and interests, so there it might become a bit challenging to fulfill everyone's need in a short time.

Discussion:

Learning contract^[19] is perhaps not a new kind of teaching tool, it has been used over a quarter of century as an alternative assessment tool in clinical education and research in the process promotes mutual inquiry and accountability between supervisor and younger student perusing internship. In the present study we found that BPT interns as well as faculty supervisors considered it as a good tool and expressed that if there is familiarization of theoretical concept about this tool then it may be further useful for their planning about personal, professional skills and soft skills and development objectives.

There is hardly any study that has investigated the utility of internship learning contract amongst physiotherapy intern students in our region as well as country.

However, we came across a study by Ayiesah Ramli, Leonard Joseph, and Seow Woon Lee studied learning pathways during clinical placement of physiotherapy students in Malaysia by means of learning contracts and reflective diaries and reported that it gives valuable insights into the experiences and opinions of students during their clinical education process, that may be useful for enhancing teaching and learning methods in physiotherapy education.^[20]

However, we found that this study did not involve faculty and interns and it was confined to final year physiotherapy students who underwent clinical placement at government hospital. However, a study done by Mahboobeh Sajadi, Neda Fayazi, Andrew Fournier, and Ahmad Reza Abedi who investigated the impact of the learning contract on self-directed learning and satisfaction in nursing students in a clinical setting and reported that there was no significant difference between students trained with conventional learning methods and using learning contract method.^[21]

Further, in this study we conducted an additional way of collecting data from the same participants in form of audio interview and we observed that some of these participants had a kind of negative perception since they thought contracts as restrictive, inflexible and one sided document hence we thought participating students may be leery and did not express all of their personal learning areas in this contract.

Some of the limitations of this study included relatively small number of participants, lack of familiarity with learning contract concept and study was done at only one institute and thus may not give a big picture of the same but during planning phase of this research basic idea was to get a bird's eye view before trying for a big picture and hence it is recommended that a similar study may be carried out involving more number of participants from various institutes and even undergraduates in addition to interns to offer value addition to prescribed regulatory curriculum in order to facilitate professional development.

Conclusion:

The use of a learning contract during BPT internship may be beneficial in enhancing self directed learning, commitment & motivation with instructional support from faculty supervisors during BPT internship program for clinical education,

research and personal development. In future, it is expected that the regular practice may help the interns and supervisors to focus the learning objectives and thereby plan to achieve the same.

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