

The role of student Health Care Professionals in chaperoning or escorting service users: Policy

The legal and ethical requirements determined by legislation (for example the Mental Capacity Act and Fraser Guidelines) must be considered when students are escorting or chaperoning service users

Following the publication of the Clifford Ayling Report (2004), this paper provides guidance for student Healthcare practitioners (HCP's) and their mentors or supervisors when considering the role of the student chaperoning escorting or a service user.

A student may be asked to "chaperone" a service user during a procedure or examination, often of an intimate nature; or they may be asked to accompany a service user who is being transferred to another unit, department etc. It is very important that the student has clarity from the mentor/supervisor about the role they are being asked to undertake. Mentors/supervisors must be clear about the expectations of the student HCP role.

Chaperoning

In the role of chaperone a student HCP may accompany a service user in order to:

- Provide emotional comfort and re-assurance to service users
- Assist a service user to dress and undress
- Help the service user understand what is happening to them.

Chaperoning is a delegated activity, and the act of delegating is governed by all disciplines' codes of conduct, performance and ethics (HCPC, 2013, NMC, 2015). Any student undertaking a chaperoning role must have permission and support from their mentor/supervisor/buddy to do this, and should be willing to undertake the role. The mentor/supervisor retains accountability for the delegated activity

Before a student HCP undertakes a role as a chaperone a risk assessment should be undertaken by the mentor/supervisor to determine:

- the complexity of the service user's needs
- the circumstances of the particular situation.
- the competency and confidence of the student to undertake the role.

A student HCP who chaperones a service user has a responsibility to safeguard that individual. To discharge this responsibility they must have an understanding of what represents good and safe practice in relation to the procedure/examination that the individual will be undergoing; it is the responsibility of the mentor/supervisor to ensure that this happens.

Students should not chaperone during intimate procedures unless they are familiar with any specific organisational policies related to the procedure, and have observed the procedure with their mentor first.

If a student is concerned about anything that occurs whilst they are chaperoning then they will be expected to raise this with their mentor as soon as possible. As a delegated responsibility the mentor remains accountable for the quality of the service to the client and would normally be expected to requesting feedback from the student regarding the individual's welfare during the procedure/examination.

Learning experiences

Student HCPs acquire learning via observation of and participation in procedures, and this role is sometimes merged with that of chaperoning a service user. If a student is involved in a procedure as part of a learning experience they may demonstrate some of the behaviours of a chaperone BUT IT MUST BE CLEAR TO ALL in what capacity the student is expected to act.

Similarly, if a student has been delegated the role of a chaperone then the focus of their learning is on how to care for the client undergoing the procedure; it is not primarily for them to learn about a clinical procedure: they must remain focussed on supporting and advocating for the client.

Students undertaking intimate procedures

Students may themselves require a chaperone if they are involved in the performance of intimate procedures and should assess the situation with their mentor/supervisor and decide with them if the situation indicates that a chaperone is required.

Transfer/Escort:

Student HCPs may be asked to accompany a service user who is being transferred to another ward, department, hospital, residence or community activity. Local practice policies should determine the level of care and expertise required for each individual, including during transfer and for the process of handover.

If the student HCP is deemed to be competent to manage the care of the service user throughout the transfer process, then they may accompany the service user as the escort, and may be responsible for handing over information about the individual.

This is also a delegated activity and the same risk assessments and safeguards apply as for chaperoning.

References:

Committee of Inquiry. (2004) *Independent Investigation into how the NHS handled allegations about the conduct of Clifford Ayling*. The Honourable Mrs Justice Pauffely. D.B.E. July 2004

Health and Care Professions Council (2012) *Standards of conduct, performance and ethics*. HCPC

Nursing and Midwifery Council (2015) *The code for nurses and midwives* NMC

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