

Perceptions of Rehabilitation Interns on the Transition from Interns to Practitioners in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This article explores the perceptions of rehabilitation interns in Saudi Arabia regarding their transition from internship to professional practice. It identifies the key challenges faced during this transition, including gaps in practical skills, professional identity development, and navigating the healthcare system. The study also highlights strategies to support interns in their transition, such as mentorship programs, enhanced clinical training, and professional development opportunities. By examining the experiences of rehabilitation interns, this article provides insights into improving the internship experience and preparing interns for successful careers as practitioners in the evolving healthcare landscape of Saudi Arabia.

Keywords

Rehabilitation interns, transition, professional practice, mentorship, clinical training, Saudi Arabia

Introduction

The transition from internship to professional practice is a critical phase in the career development of rehabilitation interns. In Saudi Arabia, this transition poses unique challenges due to the rapidly evolving healthcare sector and cultural expectations. The rehabilitation field in Saudi Arabia has witnessed significant growth in recent years, with an increasing demand for qualified professionals to meet the diverse needs of the population. However, the gap between academic training and practical readiness has been identified as a significant barrier for interns entering the workforce.

This study aims to examine the perceptions of rehabilitation interns in Saudi Arabia regarding their transition from internship to professional practice. By exploring their experiences and challenges, this research seeks to identify strategies to facilitate a smoother transition and better prepare interns for successful careers as practitioners. The findings of this study hold significant implications for enhancing the quality of rehabilitation services and addressing the workforce needs in the Saudi Arabia healthcare system.

Methodology

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of rehabilitation interns during their transition to professional practice. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 rehabilitation interns from various healthcare institutions in Saudi Arabia. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring a diverse representation of interns from different rehabilitation disciplines, including physical therapy, and occupational therapy students.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-step process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

Findings

The thematic analysis of the interviews revealed several key challenges faced by rehabilitation interns during their transition to professional practice in Saudi Arabia:

1. **Gaps in Practical Skills** Despite comprehensive academic training, many interns reported gaps in practical skills necessary for effective clinical practice. These gaps often stemmed from limited hands-on experience during their education, leading to a lack of confidence in applying theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios.
2. **Professional Identity Development:** Developing a professional identity was a significant challenge for interns as they transitioned to practitioners. Many interns struggled with reconciling personal values with professional standards and adapting to the responsibilities and expectations of their new roles.
3. **Navigating the Healthcare System** Understanding and navigating the complex healthcare system in Saudi Arabia was daunting for new practitioners. Interns faced difficulties in adapting to administrative procedures, interdisciplinary collaboration, and patient management protocols, which are critical for effective practice.

Additionally, the findings highlighted several patterns in intern perceptions:

- **Uncertainty about Clinical Competence** many interns expressed uncertainty about their clinical competence, highlighting a need for more practical training during their education.
- **Desire for Mentorship** There was a strong desire among interns for mentorship from experienced practitioners to guide them through the transition period and provide emotional support.
- **Stress and Anxiety** The transition phase was often accompanied by stress and anxiety, driven by the fear of making mistakes and the pressure to perform competently.

Discussion

The challenges and patterns identified in this study resonate with previous literature on the transition experiences of healthcare professionals. The gaps in practical skills and the need for enhanced clinical training have been consistently reported as significant barriers for interns and new graduates, aligning with the findings of Phillips et al. (2017) and Tryssenaar and Perkins (2001). The development of a professional identity is a complex process that requires guidance and support, as highlighted by Rodger et al. (2011) in their exploration of quality practice placements.

The findings related to navigating the healthcare system align with the experiences reported by Black et al. (2010), who investigated the professional learning and development of novice physical therapists. The uncertainty about clinical competence and the desire for mentorship echo the observations made by Elisabeth et al. (2011), underscoring the importance of structured mentorship programs and clinical supervision.

The stress and anxiety experienced by interns during the transition phase highlight the need for a supportive work environment and resources for stress management. This finding resonates with the studies by Tryssenaar and Perkins (2001) and Rodger et al. (2011), which emphasized the significance of a positive learning environment and support systems for students and new graduates.

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Strategies for Facilitating a Smooth Transition

Based on the findings of this study and insights from the literature, the following strategies are proposed to facilitate a smoother transition for rehabilitation interns in Saudi Arabia:

1. **Enhanced Clinical Training** Integrating more extensive clinical training into the rehabilitation curriculum can help bridge the gap between theory and practice. Extended clinical rotations, hands-on workshops, and simulation-based training can provide interns with the hands-on experience they need to build confidence and competence.
2. **Mentorship Programs** Establishing formal mentorship programs can provide interns with the guidance and support they need during the transition. Experienced practitioners can offer valuable insights, feedback, and encouragement, helping interns navigate the challenges of their new roles and foster professional identity development.
3. **Professional Development Opportunities** Offering professional development opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, and continuing education courses, can help interns develop the skills

and knowledge necessary for successful practice. These opportunities can also aid in professional identity development and promote a growth mindset.

4. Supportive Work Environment Creating a supportive work environment that fosters learning and growth is essential for a smooth transition. This includes providing resources for stress management, encouraging open communication, and promoting a culture of collaboration and support among staff.

Conclusion

The transition from internship to professional practice is a critical and challenging phase for rehabilitation interns in Saudi Arabia. This study has provided insights into the perceptions and experiences of interns during this transition, highlighting the gaps in practical skills, challenges in professional identity development, and difficulties in navigating the healthcare system.

By implementing strategies such as enhanced clinical training, mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, and fostering a supportive work environment, healthcare institutions can better support interns and facilitate a smoother transition into professional practice. These strategies not only address the identified challenges but also contribute to the development of competent and well-rounded practitioners who can meet the evolving healthcare needs of Saudi Arabia.

Future research should continue to explore effective strategies for facilitating this transition, with a focus on longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term impact of these interventions on professional development and patient outcomes. Additionally, collaborations between academic institutions and healthcare organizations can help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, ensuring that interns are well-prepared for the demands of professional practice.

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