ABSTRACT (Limited to 300 Words):

Title:
STUDENTS’ DESCRIPTION OF FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO A MEANING CLINICAL EXPERIENCE IN ENTRY-LEVEL PHYSICAL THERAPIST PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION.

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This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Mayo Clinic as a minimal risk study. Each subject was provided written informed consent prior to participating. No funding was used.

Purpose:
To identify student, clinical instructor, and environmental characteristics that make for positive clinical experiences as perceived by physical therapy students.

Subjects:
Nine third-year DPT students from academic programs around the country.

Methods:
This is a phenomenologic study in which subjects were interviewed using open-ended hermeneutic interview questions designed to facilitate each student to describe characteristics of students, clinical instructors, and environments that contribute to positive clinical experiences. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, validated, and analyzed.

Analyses:
Themes were identified through collaborative analysis by members of the research team using constant comparative coding.

Results:
Students described many factors that contribute to a quality clinical experience including factors associated with the student, clinical instructor, or environment at the clinical site. Among the many characteristics, some of those that will be reported include: the students’ demonstration of initiative to prepare for the clinical experience, including preparation after clinic hours; the importance of the clinical instructors’ insight, allowing CI’s to ascertain how much guidance to give in order to foster independence in the student; and the clinical environments’ ability to welcome a student and provide the student with novel learning experiences.

Conclusions:
Based on student descriptions, there are numerous factors that contribute to a positive clinical experience, including those related to the student, CI, and the clinical environment. Many of the factors can be influenced by training or preparation for the student and the CI prior to the clinical experience.

Implications:
The student descriptions, including both positive and negative examples shared by the interviewees, demonstrates essential characteristics that contribute to a positive clinical experience as perceived by the students. Many of these characteristics can be influenced by
training. This project suggests the need for training and preparation for both the student and the CI before embarking in clinical education.