

# **Blogging and the development of critical reflection in Pharmacy**

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## **AIM**

To investigate the extent to which the use of blogs ('weblogs'; online diaries) can lead to qualitative differences in Pharmacy students' reflective thinking abilities during clinical placement.

## **METHOD**

MPharm students undertaking clinical placements must submit two diaries reflecting on their experiences - one in the first half of the placement and one in the second. For this study, one diary was submitted as a private, 'paper-based' document (i.e. traditional, journal-like reflection) and the other as a public, 'blog-based' diary. Blog instructions encouraged students to read and comment on each other's work. The diaries were evaluated using Biggs' SOLO taxonomy. A brief questionnaire and focus group interviews were used to gauge students' experiences of both the diary and blog in the learning context. Metrics of student activity (number of blog-posts) were recorded.

## **OUTCOMES**

There was no demonstrable difference in the quality of students' reflection between paper vs blog-based mediums. In contrast to our expectation that writing for an audience of peers would encourage students to be more reflective, it appears that students have simply 'lowered the tone' - i.e. posted comments in the blog-space which were more superficial than in the paper-based diaries. In focus group discussions, students were overwhelmingly positive about the use of blogs; this medium facilitated regular and ongoing reflection on their placement experiences, and felt "more like conversation". However, to achieve deeper reflection, some training/ brainstorming on the discourse features of a blog might be required, similarly to that provided for paper-based reflection.

Blog-based reflection is favoured by students as a more relaxed medium for recording their placement experiences. However, to facilitate higher level reflection, additional scaffolding may be required.