

Supporting information for reflection in nursing and midwifery practice

Published: April 2024

Overview

Reflection is a critical and necessary part of nursing and midwifery practice. It is essential to continuous learning and improvement of practice that benefits those we care for. It enables students and registered professionals to make sense of a situation and understand how it has affected them, contributing to personal as well as professional development. It helps them to identify areas for learning and development, including from things that have gone well, to include in their professional development objectives. It also supports sharing and learning from other professionals.

Reflection related to practice is an essential part of learning, whether as a student or as a registered professional, and is an essential element of revalidation. It aims to foster development of self-awareness and understanding and support continuous improvement. It is integrated through pre-registration and post-registration curricula and is fundamental to the practice of all registered professionals.

All involved in the education, support, supervision and assessment of pre-registration student nurses, student midwives, student nursing associates and post-registration students have a key role in supporting students' continuous professional development, as well reflecting on their own practice.

Ways of learning from practice

Reflection supports identification of learning and development needs. It can inform student and the registered professionals' understanding of practice, be effective in supporting wellbeing and improve care of people and care services. Schon (1983, 1991) describes two key ways of learning from practice namely:

1. Reflection 'in action' - whilst practising

This is about thinking on your feet or on the spot, for example whilst caring for someone. It involves actively thinking about what you are doing, for example what you can see, hear and feel as you interact with the person you are caring for, considering their response and your effectiveness as you practise.

2. Reflection 'on action' – after practice has taken place

This requires planning, structure and a time commitment that can be a challenge to, but engaging in reflection is important and necessary to learning, and to personal, professional, team and organisational development that contributes to improving care of people.

Reflection supports identification of learning and development needs. It can inform student and registrant understanding of practice and can be effective in supporting wellbeing.

Reflective practice requires conscious and concerted effort to appraise a situation or care episode, with an awareness of ones' own values, beliefs, knowledge, experience and limitations to support ones learning from this experience. Reflection may be prompted by feedback from colleagues or people we care for. Reflection may include, for example, may include consideration of evidence, best practice guidance and theoretical underpinnings to practice.

Reflection can be informal, for example an opportunistic discussion with a colleague after an episode of care; or it can be more formalised, planned or structured, for example, following a critical incident or difficult situation, or when a complex care event is managed effectively.

Reflection may result in personal and professional learning, or in action planning to enhance ways of working or care of people.

The amount of time spent reflecting in and on practice will vary depending on the requirements of the individual student or registered professional, as well as the complexity or emotional impact of the practice experience.

Reflection as an activity is described in different ways. For example, it can be an element of clinical supervision and debriefing.

Reflection on practice can be engaged in as an individual student, with a peer or peers, with colleagues who have a similar or different level of experience or grade, or with professionals from any of the multidisciplinary team. Reflection for students is supported by a practice supervisor and / or practice assessor who can help them to learn and develop their practice from their reflections.

Reflection in our Code and Standards:

[The Code](#) (2018) says you must reflect and act on any feedback received to improve practice (practice effectively) and use complaints to reflect upon to improve practice (promoting professionalism and trust):

Practise effectively You assess need and deliver or advise on treatment, or give help (including preventative or rehabilitative care) without too much delay, to the best of your abilities, on the basis of best available evidence. You communicate effectively, keeping clear and accurate records and sharing skills, knowledge and experience where appropriate. You reflect and act on any feedback you receive to improve your practice.

9 Share your skills, knowledge and experience for the benefit of people receiving care and your colleagues

To achieve this, you must:

9.2 gather and reflect on feedback from a variety of sources, using it to improve your practice and performance

Promote professionalism and trust

24 Respond to any complaints made against you professionally

To achieve this, you must:

24.2 use all complaints as a form of feedback and an opportunity for reflection and learning to improve practice

The [Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education](#) (2018) highlights the importance of the well-being of others, and to achieve this critical self-reflection is required for safe practice and to be used to learn from mistakes made. Students should be empowered to develop reflective practice so they can become lifelong learners, this can help them to develop their ability to practise as independent reflective practitioners. Students are expected to consider their feedback throughout their programme to develop reflective practice and that this can be used as evidence in their assessments.

1.2 prioritise the wellbeing of people promoting critical self-reflection and safe practice in accordance with the Code

1.8 ensure mistakes and incidents are fully investigated and learning reflections and actions are recorded and disseminated

3.2 Students are empowered and supported to become resilient, caring, reflective and lifelong learners who are capable of working in inter-professional and inter-agency teams.

3.14 are provided with the learning and pastoral support necessary to empower them to prepare for independent, reflective professional practice

3.17 receive constructive feedback throughout the programme from stakeholders with experience of the programme to promote and encourage reflective learning,

5.13 students' self-reflections contribute to, and are evidenced in, assessments

The [Standards for student supervision and assessment](#) (2018) support the process of reflection and are linked to the need for practice supervisors, practice assessors and academic assessors to be suitably prepared and able to reflect on their roles to support student learning, with the inclusion that student reflection can be used as evidence in their assessments.

5. Practice supervisors: preparation

Approved education institutions, together with practice learning partners, must ensure that practice supervisors:

5.1 receive ongoing support to prepare, reflect and develop for effective supervision and contribution to student learning and assessment

7. Practice assessors: responsibilities

Approved education institutions, together with practice learning partners, must ensure that:

7.3 practice assessors make and record objective, evidenced-based assessments on conduct, proficiency and achievement, drawing on student records, direct observations, student self-reflection, and other resources.

8. Practice assessors: preparation

Approved education institutions, together with practice learning partners, must ensure that practice assessors

8.2 receive ongoing support and training to reflect and develop in their role

10. Academic assessors: preparation

Approved education institutions, together with practice learning partners, must ensure that academic assessors:

10.3 receive ongoing support and training to reflect and develop in their role

[Future Nurse: Standards of proficiency for nurses](#) (2018) states that reflection is linked to being an accountable practitioner (platform 1) and the need for ongoing continuous assessment. It is also included in leading and managing care (platform 5) and the need to promote reflection within individuals and within teams to be used as a way of improving individual practice and the wider service provision. This helps with lifelong learning and future practice.

Platform 1 Being an accountable professional

Registered nurses continually reflect on their practice and keep abreast of new and emerging developments in nursing, health and care.

1.14 provide and promote non-discriminatory, person centred and sensitive care at all times, reflecting on people's values and beliefs, diverse backgrounds, cultural characteristics, language requirements, needs and preferences, taking account of any need for adjustments

1.17 take responsibility for continuous self-reflection, seeking and responding to support and feedback to develop their professional knowledge and skills

Platform 5 Leading and managing nursing care and working in teams

5.8 support and supervise students in the delivery of nursing care, promoting reflection and providing constructive feedback, and evaluating and documenting their performance

5.10 contribute to supervision and team reflection activities to promote improvements in practice and services

6.8 demonstrate an understanding of how to identify, report and critically reflect on near misses, critical incidents, major incidents and serious adverse events in order to learn from them and influence their future practice

Annex A

4.1.4 encouragement to colleagues that helps them to reflect on their practice

Glossary

Self-Reflection/Reflection: to carefully consider actions or decisions and learn from them

In the [Standards of proficiency for midwives](#) (2019) reflection is identified in Domain 1 around being accountable and autonomous and the need for continuous self-reflection to develop professional knowledge, understanding and skills. Promoting excellence (domain 5) focuses on reflecting in the within the wider team to promote improvements in service provision. It is also identified as a tool to support the development of resilience for working in stressful environments and to be used for problem solving and planning. Domain 6 also refers to being able to reflect and contribute to controversial debates as well as reflecting on learning that informs professional development and practice.

Domain 1: Being an accountable, autonomous, professional midwife

1.27 take responsibility for continuous self-reflection, seeking and responding to all support and feedback to develop their professional knowledge, understanding, and skills

Domain 5: Promoting excellence: the midwife as colleague, scholar and leader

5.2 demonstrate an understanding of how to identify, report and critically reflect on near misses, critical incidents, major incidents, and serious adverse events

5.9 contribute to team reflection activities to promote improvements in practice and service

5.13 demonstrate the ability to develop the strength, resourcefulness, and flexibility needed to work in stressful and difficult situations, and to develop strategies to contribute to safe and effective practice; this must include: 5.13.1 individual and team reflection, problem solving, and planning

5.21 support and supervise students in the provision of midwifery care, promoting reflection, providing constructive feedback, and evaluating and documenting their performance

Domain 6: Proficiency

Being an accountable, autonomous, professional midwife: skills for Domain 1

6.6 reflect on and debate topics including those that are seen to be challenging or contentious

A. Working with others: the midwife as colleague

6.85.2 provide encouragement to colleagues and students that helps them to reflect on their practice

6.86.5 reflecting on learning that comes from working with interdisciplinary and multiagency teams

6.87 demonstrate skills to recognise and respond to vulnerability in self and others, including:

6.87.1 self-reflection

B. Developing knowledge, positive role modelling and leadership: the midwife as scholar and leader

6.88 reflect on own thoughts and feelings around positive and negative feedback, and take responsibility for incorporating relevant changes into practice and behaviour

6.89.2 reflection on learning that informs professional development and practice

In the [Standards of proficiency for nursing associates](#) (2018) reflection is linked to being an accountable practitioner (platform 1) and the need for ongoing continuous development. It is also included in working in teams (platform 4) with the need to act as role models and support and supervise students promoting reflection and giving constructive feedback, and the need to improve safety and quality of care (platform 5).

Platform 1 Being an accountable professional

1.11 provide, promote, and where appropriate advocate for, non-discriminatory, person-centred and sensitive care at all times. Reflect on people's values and beliefs, diverse backgrounds, cultural characteristics, language requirements, needs and preferences, taking account of any need for adjustment

1.15 take responsibility for continuous self-reflection, seeking and responding to support and feedback to develop professional knowledge and skills

Platform 4 Working in teams 4.7 support, supervise and act as a role model to nursing associate students, health care support workers and those new to care roles, review the quality of the care they provide, promoting reflection and providing constructive feedback

4.8 contribute to team reflection activities, to promote improvements in practice and service

Platform 5 Improving safety and quality of care

5.4 encouragement to colleagues that helps them to reflect on their practice

Glossary Reflection: to carefully consider actions or decisions and learn from them

Frequently asked questions:

Can you give me some examples of reflecting?

Reflective practice requires conscious and concerted effort to appraise a situation or care episode, with an awareness of ones' own values, beliefs, knowledge, experience and limitations to support ones learning from this experience. Reflection may be prompted by feedback from colleagues or people we care for. Reflection may include, for example, may include consideration of evidence, best practice guidance and theoretical underpinnings to practice.

Reflection as an activity is described in different ways. For example, it can be an element of clinical supervision and debriefing.

- Reflection can be informal, for example an opportunistic discussion with a colleague after an episode of care.
- Reflection can be more formalised planned or structured, for example following a critical incident or difficult situation, or when a complex care event is managed effectively.
- Reflection may result in personal and professional learning, or in action planning to enhance ways of working or care of people.
- Reflecting on practice can be engaged in as an individual student, with a peer or group of peers, with colleagues who have a similar or different level of experience or grade, or with professionals from within the wider multidisciplinary team. A practice supervisor and / or practice assessor will support students to learn and develop from their reflections.

Is reflection counted as practice learning for student nurses, student midwives and student nursing associates?

Reflection in action and reflection on action are essential elements of practice and of learning from practise, and so reflection associated with practice that is agreed and supported by practice supervision can be counted within practice learning hours. Reflection 'on action' that is planned after practice experience or activity will usually be structured, will be purposeful, and supported by practice supervision so that it contributes to learning from practise.

Clinical supervision and debriefing that include reflection are structured and supervised as practice learning activities, so can also be counted as practice learning hours.

What elements of practice should a student reflect on?

Any element of nursing and midwifery practice can be reflected on. This includes planned and emergency care episodes, interactions and communication with others, experiences of team working and feedback from others, including people we care for. It includes thinking through and learning from practice that has gone really well and had a positive outcome, and events that may have been difficult, distressing or not had the outcome planned. All students and registered professionals can learn from and share good practice, and consider, learn and develop following practice that could be improved.

How much reflection time can be allocated to students per week of practice learning?

Time spent reflecting will vary depending on the nature of the care event or practice the student has experienced, and the individual requirements of the student. Reflection is

person-centred and context dependent. For example, a practice event that could be traumatising for someone may require more time spent reflecting than an episode of care that has gone well. As with all practice learning, practice supervision will support student reflection activities. This could include structuring, planning or discussing the learning from reflecting, or action planning following reflecting on practice.

How much reflection time can be included as part of simulated practice learning activities (nursing only)?

Practice learning whether engaged in through simulation or through any other practice learning environment would follow the same principles in terms of time to reflect. The amount of time required for reflection will vary depending on the nature of the care event or practice experienced, and the requirements of the student(s). Time reflecting should be purposeful, structured, related to a practice experience and supported by a practice supervision.

What reflection do I need to engage in to revalidate as a nurse, midwife or nursing associate?

You must have had a reflective discussion with another NMC registrant, covering five written reflective accounts on your continuing professional development (CPD) and/or practice-related feedback and/or an event or experience in your practice and how this relates to the Code and standards. [Further guidance is available here.](#)

Do I have to use a model to reflect?

Verbal reflection with others, and written accounts of reflection, do not need to use a model, though many find them useful to guide how they think and reflect, and can be helpful in capturing reflections, learning points and actions.

Who can I reflect on my practice with?

Generally, you can engage in reflection alone, with peers, with colleagues, or with other members of the team who care for people, at any time.

For students, reflection activities must be supported by a practice supervisor or assessor if they are to contribute to practice learning hours.

Can the breaks I take in practice be counted as reflection time?

No. It is important that all students are given rest or break times during the day, in accordance with the principles of [Rest breaks at work: Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). This is essential to support their health and wellbeing needs.

If a student is given **additional** time specifically to reflect on their practice whilst still in the practice learning environment the student may be permitted to include some protected time for reflective practice as part of their overall practice learning time, but this should be purposeful, have been agreed by, and be supported by, their practice supervisor or practice assessor.

References:

- Schon, D.A. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. London: Temple Smith
- Schon, D. A. (1991). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd