Basic Life Support

Our Basic Life Support (BLS) course is a unique part of studying healthcare science courses at Birmingham. The course is taken by all first year undergraduate and graduate medicine, dentistry, physiotherapy and pharmacy students and provides exciting, relevant interprofessional clinical training at a very early stage. The skills learnt here are essential for all medical professionals and lay the foundations for resuscitation and acute care training that will underpin students' practice throughout their careers.

Overview

The Basic Life Support course has a number of exciting features that make it a truly unique part of the Birmingham experience:

1. **Near-peer teaching** – 1st year students are taught by trained 2nd year students and assessed by students in their 3rd, 4th and 5th years of study.

2. **Offers teaching and assessment experience** – at the end of the 1st year, students may apply to teach on the course. Not only is this great fun, but it provides experience that is highly valued by employers and the GMC.

3. **Offers committee & leadership experience** – the course is organised and run by a student committee. The supervising clinical staff take a hands-off approach to running the course, providing students with unprecedented organisational responsibility in a supported environment.

4. **Offers research experience** – the course has a strong research background and the students involved in running it have presented work at a number of international conferences, most recently in Porto and Vienna.

5. **Offers experience in teaching school children** – our student teachers have the opportunity to teach BLS to local school children as part of the British Heart Foundation's HeartStart programme, and to prospective students and their parents at University open and community days.

For us, an important feature is that, whilst only 1st years take the course, for those wishing to remain involved it really is a course that keeps on giving throughout your time at Birmingham; providing valuable experience and qualifications to further students' professional development.

The first year experience

Over the course of their 1st year, students will attend four Monday evening sessions lasting 2½ hours each. During these practical sessions students learn:

- Assessment of an unconscious patient
- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation
- Use of an automated defibrillator
- How to place a casualty in the recovery position.
- First aid: management of chocking, bleeding andshock

On the fourth evening the students take an exit examination. This is compulsory and required for students to progress in to their 2nd year. After 8½ hours of practical teaching, students are highly competent providers of the BLS skill-set.

On successful completion of the course, students gain certification as a BLS providers from the European Resuscitation Council; we are currently the only UK body to award this internationally recognised qualification.

The course is also endorsed the Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine, the professional body for health care professionals involved in intensive care medicine.

Getting involved with the course

Our student teachers are mostly 2nd year students with a few students from older years. Our examiners are 3rd year students and older.

After taking the course, all 1st year students have the opportunity to apply to teach the course. On successfully applying, students are trained to teach using a syllabus fully accredited by the European Resuscitation Council. Teachers teach their groups independently but are supported by a member of the committee.

Having successfully taught for a year, teachers may apply to become examiners. Examiners are re-taught on the standard Basic Life Support Course and receive additional training focussed on how to examine students.

Every year, a small number of students join the organising committee to replace the students graduating. This is a very exciting opportunity to develop organisational, leadership and research skills. Many committee members will also choose to remain associated and involved with the course from and help with the training of new teachers.

Community involvement

As of 2013, we are providers of the British Heart Foundation (BHF) HeartStart course. This initiative from the BHF aims to teach school-age children basic life support skills and reduce the number of deaths from cardiac arrest.

Teachers who have taught for at least one year have the opportunity to teach in local schools.

Research

The Birmingham Basic Life Support course has a strong history of producing high-quality, student-led research. Previous topics have included:

a. Analysing the success of near-peer BLS teaching.

b. Investigating the best ways to deliver high-quality BLS in challenging environments.

c. Investigating the effects of new guidelines for BLS provision.

d. Testing new methods of teaching BLS.

This research has not only been presented at several international conferences, but has led to numerous publications in peer-reviewed journals.

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