

Press Release

Issue date: Dec 6 2007

State of the art anaesthetics lab helps medical students hone their life saving skills

The anaesthetic department of the Royal United Hospital (RUH) has opened a new hands on teaching laboratory to help medical students learn vital airway skills* when looking after patients.

The lab has been set up with the aid of money from the University of Bristol. RUH anaesthetist Doctor Chris Seller, who helped secure the funding, says: "We're very lucky to have this facility – only a handful of trusts in the country have a lab like this. When I was going through medical school there was no real 'hands on' manikin or patient training – just a series of lectures. This lab allows students to become much more involved and they learn critical, potentially life-saving, skills which they can use as junior doctors on the ward."

In the lab, the students get a chance to use equipment needed for intubating and ventilating patients (i.e. placing a tube in the windpipe and taking over breathing for the patient). These skills are at the heart of anaesthetics and resuscitation manoeuvres.

Emily Bednall, a 4th year medical student from Bristol, has just spent 3 weeks doing her anaesthetic placement at the RUH. She has shadowed anaesthetists in their work in operating theatres, intensive care, and in the management of post-operative and chronic pain. She says her time in the lab has really helped: "It enables us to practice on models without fear of anything going wrong, so it really increases your confidence when dealing with patients."

Final year medical student Laura Bland says: "The opportunity to go into a safe, controlled environment and practice hands on is invaluable. If you haven't had the experience of inserting equipment to help manage a patient's breathing before, it can be very daunting in a real life operating theatre situation."

Doctor Tim Cook who helped design the lab says: "In addition to training medical students, the lab has also been used for running advanced training courses for the resident RUH anaesthetists. The lab provides an environment, like a simulation centre for pilots, where the management of dangerous situations and rare crises can be practiced without any risk to patients. As a doctor, one never stops learning, and practice increases an anaesthetist's familiarity and increases patient safety."

Finally, the RUH's anaesthetists have been performing research (funded by a grant from the Difficult Airway Society) to determine which of several manikins are the best models for simulating particular crises and for practicing lifesaving techniques. As a result of this research, five academic papers have been published in the last year.

Note for Editors

***airway management is the name given to the critically important skills required to allow a patient to breath through an unobstructed passage while unconscious, whether through illness or anaesthesia.**

- Photo opportunity teaching session with medical students using manikins at 10-11am, Dec 11th Dept of Anaesthesia RUH. Meet Brigid Devlin in Atrium at 10. (see attached pictures)
- 22,000 anaesthetics are given at the RUH every year. 75% of these are general anaesthetics – the remainder spinal/epidural and local anaesthetics. An additional 4000 procedures are performed for pain relief in labour and in the pain clinic.
- There are currently 20 consultant anaesthetists in the RUH and 25 trainee staff.
- 4th and final year medical students from University of Bristol come to Bath for a block of 3 weeks anaesthetic training every year.

Ends

Issued by: Communications office Brigid Devlin