

**Lee** [01:00:04]

So hi and welcome to another episode of your First of Everything. My name is Lee and I'm very fortunate to have with me today Eleanor, who is a occupational therapy student. Hi, Eleanor. How are you?

**Eleanor** [01:00:20]

I'm good, thank you. How are you?

**Lee** [01:00:22]

I'm brill. Thank you. Thank you so much for coming to speak to us today. We really appreciate it. So you're going to be talking to us around your first experience of very specific type placements.

**Eleanor** [01:00:37]

Yeah. So my first placement as an art student is on an acute, mental health ward. Up until this point, I'd only ever worked with care of the elderly. So an acute mental health setting was quite a dramatic change. For me, just on my my first day, you had to be white. You had to wait to get through the airlock to get onto the ward. You were handed an alarm and it told how to use it. None of which I'd ever had to go through before, but it was an amazing difference in that, the staff I was working with were very supportive, and the thing that I was having a difficulty with, they were very open about just come and talk to us. And it was a wonderful opportunity to actually sit and talk to people on a generally on a, on a, a physical health ward. You've got so much you need to do that sitting and talking to patients isn't always something that you have the time to do, but a lot of what OT and mental health is about is talking to them, getting to know them, understanding what's most important to them. And that's always been where I've, I've loved. So, yeah, it was it was really, really wonderful as an experience.

**Lee** [01:02:06]

It sounds wonderful and like a really sort of holistic experience as well in terms of that holistic, elements of care and those communication skills.

**Eleanor** [01:02:17]

Absolutely. And I also learned that a lot about the communication is, it's not necessarily me talking to somebody. It's allowing somebody to talk to you. We had who came in and, she self was further on to the ward and all she wanted to do was talk. And I spent an hour walking round the garden with her. I think I maybe said five words. All she needed was to talk. Didn't necessarily want answers, didn't necessarily want, anything specific for me. She just wanted somebody to sound off. And that is one of the things I think occupational therapy gives you the, the time and the ability to do is because that is what we're there for. We are there to look at, what is most important to the person and building that kind of therapeutic relationship with them. In order to, to find out what they most need. So, yeah, a lot of, especially in mental health, a lot of what we do is, is just talking to people and finding out where they're coming from. So yeah, it was I always I've always loved that. I can, sit and talk to people for hours. So it was, it was a really good feeling of, I can do this. I like this job. There was very few for me, very few negatives coming out of that experience.

**Lee** [01:03:47]

So, I mean, it almost sounds very transformative in a way, in, in terms of what it's meant to you having that sort of experience when you saw that sort of practice area on your allocation, what was your initial thoughts? Were you excited? Were you apprehensive?

**Eleanor** [01:04:07]

I was a bit apprehensive, because I'd never experienced it before. And there's a lot of people around me who are going, oh geez, acute mental health. That's going to be difficult. Like, how are you prepared for that? You know, and you're going to meet people who really, really aren't. Well. So I arrived on my first day very like, oh, am I going to be able to handle this? Can I, can I cope with this? And I'm, I wouldn't say that there weren't challenges in in acute mental health. There were quite a few challenges. But the supportive nature of the staff around me and, the days when, yeah, I did get to just sit and talk to people, find out how, what was most important to them, how they worked, how we could help them was just it gave me such a clear idea of what I wanted to do. And three years later, I still want to work in mental health. It's I've I've experienced it in the physical setting and I really enjoyed it. But I think mental health is still where I think I can really do the most good. So yeah, it was a it was very transformative for me. Yeah.

**Lee** [01:05:20]

Well, yeah. Particularly if it's informed you sort of future career choice, which is wonderful. Just I suppose it clearly has been very transformative. But for sort maybe learners who maybe get in that place type of placement allocation for the first time. What sort advice would you give them? How would you advise that they prepare maybe for that sort of learning experience?

**Eleanor** [01:05:46]

I think, read up on the kind of conditions you're going. Come across. My educator advised me to do read up again about especially conditions like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, which are very common within the mental health, inpatient setting. Read up on how they can present how best to interact with them. Because you will come across people who maybe don't have the best amount of patience. They can be triggered by quite a lot of things. You have to be very careful in the way you're talking to them. So think about how you present yourself. And just try and be as open minded as possible, because you will get people who can be very rude and very insulting. But quite often it isn't them. That's, it's the chaos that they are currently living in is making them that way. So it's being able to go okay to they're having a bad day. I'll back off and we can come back again. But it's just been prepared to. Yeah. Prepare for the fact. It'll be challenging, but just try and do as much reading around the kind of area you're in. Look into the specific ward you're going to, and look into the different professions you'll be meeting because they will be there to support you. And how how they might be interacting with you. I think, yeah, that'll be the, the main things I'd, I'd say to do.

**Lee** [01:07:22]

I think that I think that's really good advice. And I think one of the things you kind of hit on really, really well in that, was around actually that sort of emotional intelligence, you know, reading the room. But also, I suppose for learners, it's really important that they're thinking about their own well-being when engaging in that sort of practice, learning opportunities, that reflection. I suppose.

**Eleanor** [01:07:50]

You. Yeah, absolutely. Because if you having that that ability to walk away and I mean when, when people are saying nasty things to you, it's never particularly easy. But returning, as my educator would say, returning fire isn't going to help the situation. In fact, it is going to make it ten times worse. And quite often the one that comes out the worst in that situation will be you. So it's just taking a deep breath and going. There's always staff offices and places to go. And just saying to somebody like, I need five minutes, I need to go away. Process what's just happened, and then

I'll come back. Everybody should be absolutely fine with that. That should be absolutely something you are entitled to. And there is nothing wrong with taking that five minutes at five, ten minutes just to go. I need to reset how I'm feeling, how I'm thinking so I can go back out. Not necessarily with the smile on your face all the time, but just to go back out with another with the open mind again. Because we are human and yeah, being insulted or shouted out isn't easy. So. But so taking that time is essential for you and for them, so that everybody can continue to work together, I think is it's really important to do that.

**Lee** [01:09:14]

Yeah, I absolutely agree with you. I think sometimes there's, as professionals, we can sometimes feel a little bit of guilt or around needing that minute just to sort of stabilize, you know, reevaluate and then come back. But I think it's really key point with what you've made that actually, that's really important to maintain that sort of our professionalism, our well-being, that a couple of seconds just to take a breath is so important, isn't it?

**Eleanor** [01:09:42]

Yeah. And in the long run it will help you. And I think also, obviously you can't take personal information from the world home because that's, you know, you're breaking patient confidentiality. But there are certain you can go home and tell people how you're feeling. Tell people that you've had a bad day, that you've not, this happened. Or you can tell people general things so that they can get an idea that, okay, maybe, it's not going to be the easiest of evenings for you. Maybe you will just need to put your feet up on the couch and watch, rubbish TV for the evening rather than maybe doing what you plan to do. But it's very important to be able to talk to somebody, outside of the of the setting you're in, so that you can release some of those emotions and that release some of the feelings of frustration that will come along. I think it's, I mean, I always, quite often I find my mum, and it's a kind of a two way street for us when she's frustrated by something, she phones me when I'm frustrated. IPhone her. And it can be anybody can, but it can be your mum. You're sibling, you're your partner, but. Or just a friend. But there is having that somebody to go home and go, oh you. It was just a bad day today. I think is is really, really important.

**Lee** [01:11:03]

I yeah, I own I think there's a lot of power in go, you know, sort of reflecting on do you know what it was a challenging one today but it was a challenging one. But we got there. But we got there. Yeah.

**Eleanor** [01:11:15]

And we're all allowed to feel like okay, that that was a struggle because we're not going to be perfect every day. Especially not as, as newly qualified, but even people who've been on the job like 20 years, they're going to have days where things just don't go right or things have really struggled. And it's, it's okay to have those feelings. I think it's, you don't have to be perfect and you don't have to be, achieving all the time. And if you I think one of the things my educator said on that placement was never be afraid to ask a question. If if there's something, even if it's something you think is a stupid question. That doesn't matter. You still, you still need the answer. So, ask the question and see what happens. And I was never, ever told that. Oh, why don't you know that? Or you should know that by now. It's just a sometimes it was just a. Well, though, do you remember doing this? And then there was a prompt and you'd know. So, I mean, I can't promise that every area is going to be like that, but most people want you to ask questions. They don't want you to sit. Worrying about things they want you to. To learn and to. To grow. So yeah. Asking questions is a big one for me.

**Lee** [01:12:36]

No thank you, Elena. I actually found that very beneficial in listening to your experience because actually, I suppose as, as a nurse, I'd never really thought about the OT role within, a mental health setting. So that's actually been really, really beneficial, for me. So thank you very much for coming to share your experience with us.

**Eleanor** [01:12:57]

Well, thank you very much for having me. I've really enjoyed it.

**Lee** [01:13:00]

And we wish you all the very, all the very best of luck with your future career in your in those mental health settings. It's been wonderful to speak to you. Thank you.

**Eleanor** [01:13:09]

Thank you very much. Thank you.

**Lee** [01:13:11]

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