INTRODUCTION

New competencies are required in health professionals to address the inequality of health found amongst socially vulnerable people. Marginalized people avoid health services due to distrust and stigmatization. Health workers may hold judgmental attitudes towards marginalized people. Students express limited understanding of marginalized people and uncertainty in approaching them.

PROJECT AIM

The Erasmus+ project “Relevance in Practice Placements – Inclusion of Marginalized People” aims to develop new practice placement models for physiotherapy students in their work with marginalized people. The project explores how physiotherapy students experience working with people on the fringes of society, e.g. prisoners, drug abusers, people with mental health issues, and homeless people, work aimed at enabling them to support marginalized people in taking part in ordinary life, and receiving health services. Partner organisations play an active role in suggesting relevant practice placement arenas.

PROJECT METHODS

Specific novel practice placements related to health inequalities were established at both faculties in Oslo and Copenhagen and students completed practice placements working with marginalized people at homeless street football organizations, at a street hospital for drug abusers, at a community bathhouse, at a prison, and during Homeless World Cup. The students’ experiences and learning outcomes were documented using focus group interviews, and analysed using thematic text analysis.

STUDY IMPLICATIONS

In the Physiotherapy Programme at Oslo Metropolitan University:
- Practice placements of students in a street hospital for chronic drug addicts is now fully implemented
- A new curricular subject is offered where students can earn 10 ECTS points by doing unpaid, voluntary social work in a social non-profit organization of their own choice.
- All students are required to interview a socially vulnerable/marginalized/stigmatized citizen, and perform a qualitative analysis of the data.
- The curriculum has been upgraded with a larger emphasis on public health and social inequality in health.

In the physiotherapy programme at University College Copenhagen:
- A process-oriented and inductive learning environment based on mutually trusting relationships greatly supported learning and acquisitions of skills.
- In conclusion, students’ interaction with marginalized people in practice placements setting outside the established health services increased their knowledge about society, and established trusting relationships with marginalized people. Finally, the students expressed that a process-oriented and inductive learning environment based on mutually trusting relationships greatly supported learning and acquisitions of skills.

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"I think a lot of students have no real concept of what inequality really is"
"I think it is important that we are educated to be good people"