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## 6.6 International pilots

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International piloting was held in April-May 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic gave an insight into the importance of the subject of digitalisation in patient self-management support when teaching, working and studying online had become a new normal within a short period of time. On the other hand, many partner schools struggled to involve students in the piloting, as they were overloaded with the changes in studies. Also, many students were recruited to the workforce in healthcare. Regardless, a total of 24 students from four partner institutions participated in the pilot.

The international piloting included two webinars in the Zoom environment and instructed co-studying independently in the Teams environment. The first 2-hour webinar contained an introduction to the DigiNurse project, the developed model and its main themes: ethical aspects relevant to digital patient coaching, viewpoints of salutogenesis and self-management, patient coaching and coaching models and exploring the digital aspects of patient self-management and patient coaching. The working platform in Teams was also introduced and instructions for working were provided. Some additional material on the main themes was shared through the piloting platform.

Students introduced themselves in the platform and formed international pairs, agreeing to their own timetable for the coaching sessions. Each student created a short starting point story about their imaginary problem for the coaching session and familiarised themselves with the story and issue chosen by their partner. They acted in turns, being both the coach and the coachee, and recorded their sessions for reflection.

The second 2-hour reflection webinar was held a month after the first one. Students from each university made a short presentation about their experiences on the piloting, followed by facilitated discussions in small groups in Zoom break-out rooms. The students had a lively discussion, saying that online working and language barriers had felt scary beforehand, but that through practice and getting to know each other it became easy and natural.

***“Coaching in English seemed very frightening to me at first. But during coaching I noticed that it’s not that bad when you don’t come up with a word. Usually the person you are talking to understands what you want to say.”***

***“This is really an important skill for a nurse because digitalisation is widely growing in health sectors.”***

New friendships formed, and some students noted that cooperating online with students from a different country felt almost like having been in an exchange abroad. They also gained insights on studies and health-care systems in different countries and learned different forms and possibilities to apply coaching skills in their future profession.

***“This project allowed us to have new experiences and live moments with persons from different countries that taught us new things, but also fun times.”***

***“I think that the theoretical models were a big help for us to guide the coaching session, especially the GROW model, and it is really important to keep improving their use.”***

In addition to the reflection seminar, each student wrote a personal feedback note of their experiences and lessons learned during the international pilot. The students also answered the feedback questionnaire (N=18, response rate 72%) used in the TAMK pilots. The median age of the respondents was 22 years, and the respondents’ distribution was: TAMK four students, Thomas More three students, ESEnC three students and UNI-LJ eight students.

The content analysis of the open questions started separately but it was soon noted that the answers coincided remarkably with the analyses of the students’ feedback in the TAMK pilots (See the summary of the analysis in Chapter 6.1). Especially prominent themes in the feedback of the international pilot were feelings of overall positivity and new experience, overcoming language barriers, opportunities enabled by online connections and the efficiency of using distant coaching.

The students described their experiences of online coaching very positively, having a fun and interesting time during the pilot. Despite being new and unfamiliar for some, the online setup didn’t disturb anybody too much. Conducted from their own homes, the experience felt comfortable, pleasant, safe and convenient. Online coaching was also time-saving

and effective regardless of the occasional Internet problems. Overall, the students felt the experience to be professionally beneficial, and the opportunity to share topics of interest internationally felt nice.

The students recognised various advantages in online coaching and the use of digital tools. They can offer efficient healthcare services, including time efficiency, financial benefits (e.g. cutting down on unnecessary travel), convenient accessibility, a secure coaching environment and empowered self-management. A secure coaching environment meant the coachee may feel safe, comfortable, confident and protected while being in their own environment. Empowered self-management contained the use of digital tools that empowered and brought more opportunities to the patient in self-monitoring and goal tracking.

In addition, the students reflected on the disadvantages in the use of digital tools. They felt the ICT problems may hinder self-management support due to data security issues, technical problems and the requirement of digital skills. Also, the use of digital tools requires a lot of patience, and one may not concentrate as much on coaching as on a face-to-face situation.

In addition to student feedback, the co-teaching experience of nursing teachers was a pleasure, an excellent way to enjoy teaching and learn from each other.

To summarise the key lessons from the international pilot experience:

- The international pilot enhanced students' coaching skills as well as the skills and courage to work in online settings and in a foreign language.
- Co-teaching online worked well and can benefit partner institutions and individual teachers.
- Timetable issues and fitting the content to different student groups' programmes as well as the language barriers may challenge such international studying on a bigger scale outside the project's scope.

The feedback from the international pilot was a very positive and enriching experience and encouraging to all attendants. It was encouraging enough to continue the similar co-teaching style and format in the future. The most prominent impression of the international piloting webinar was the common feeling of meeting old friends as the second webinar started. This form of co-studying and co-learning can truly be recommended.