

Who's who in healthcare: findings from a student-led interprofessional pilot project

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INTRODUCTION

The delivery of healthcare in Canada is currently evolving towards a more interprofessional approach, with healthcare professionals working collaboratively to provide optimal and comprehensive services. Upon completion of health programs, graduates are expected to work together in practice settings; however, limited interactions between health programs contribute to a lack of understanding about other professions within the workforce (Phillipon, Pimlott, King, Day, & Cox, 2005). Creating interprofessional experiences for students is a key educational strategy to address this deficit (Headrick & Khaleel, 2008). The silos of health programs have driven the development of student advocacy groups. Local and national student groups strive to influence the way in which healthcare is provided by advocating for interprofessional education (IPE) for students to learn with, from, and about each other prior to initiating practice (Centre for Advancement in Interprofessional Education, 2002). This type of peer-to-peer learning, as suggested by Hoffman, Rosenfield, Gilbert and Oandasan (2008), may positively influence students' attitudes regarding different healthcare professions. Moreover, shared learning provides an opportunity for informal social gatherings among students from different programs. These gatherings foster friendships between students, thus developing respect for each other and each other's profession (Hoffman et al., 2008).

The aim of this project was to create a student-developed interprofessional workshop that involved IPE student leaders and professionals as informal educators. The IPE

student leaders worked with seven healthcare professionals and a faculty advisor to design a workshop with the purpose of enabling students to: define scopes of practice; explore healthcare providers' roles in different healthcare settings (acute, rehabilitation, and community); and work in a team to develop a care plan. This paper will describe the development of the workshop and its evaluation.

BACKGROUND

In consultation with the healthcare professionals, a clinical case study was selected from a literature review and simplified to a level deemed appropriate for students from different professional programs and at different stages of their education. The professionals included: a physician, two registered nurses, an occupational therapist, a physiotherapist, a clinical psychologist, and a social worker. A standardized patient was also included in the workshop.

During the workshop, students were divided into interprofessional teams of seven to eight students and assigned to one of the following healthcare settings: acute care, rehabilitation care, or community care. After the teams read the case study, the professionals and the standardized patient rotated in pairs to each team to assist students in understanding how professionals practice in different settings. The professionals were unaware of what the other pairs discussed with the groups. This provided students with an opportunity to learn perspectives and judgments from different professions and to experience the overlapping scopes of practice.

After the full rotation, student teams developed an integrated care plan that was presented to other participants.

By responding to three question prompts professionals provided informal feedback on each care plan, on what they found surprising, and on how well the students collaborated. The standardized patient provided informal feedback to the teams regarding their thoughts on how well they were involved in their own care planning. The workshop concluded with a group reflection conducted by a student facilitator.

METHODS

Participants

The sample consisted of 40 students (33 participants and 7 facilitators) who were invited to participate via various methods of mass communication, such as emails, a social networking website (Facebook), and advertisements posted in various campus locations. The workshop and the collection of information from participants conformed to the principles stated in the Declaration of Helsinki. Students voluntarily participated in the workshop, and provided informed consent for completion of the survey (World Medical Association, 2008). Twenty-seven participants voluntarily completed the post-workshop survey and represented the following programs: Health Sciences ($n = 4$), Medical Sciences ($n = 3$), Dietetics ($n = 4$), Nursing ($n = 6$), Occupational Therapy ($n = 1$), Pharmacy ($n = 1$), Physical Therapy ($n = 3$), Respiratory Therapy ($n = 3$), and Social Work ($n = 2$). The workshop attracted students with and without previous exposure to IPE (59% and 41%, respectively).

Data collection and analysis

The workshop evaluation was conducted using a self-reported survey consisting of questions scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The student surveys were self-developed with survey questions modified from existing surveys used in previous IPE workshops offered by the Office of Interprofessional Health Education and Research at the University of Western Ontario. Due to the small sample size, statistical analysis was not conducted on this dataset. General trends revealed by this data were used to determine

participant satisfaction and perceptions of the efficacy of the workshop.

RESULTS

Survey results indicated that workshop participation strongly improved or somewhat improved the majority of students' awareness of the various professional roles in healthcare (88.9%) (Table I). Most students reported that exploring the three healthcare settings was beneficial and improved their understanding of how professional practice varies depending on the setting and the patient's progress along the care continuum (81.5%). Additionally, students indicated that providing a clinical case study enhanced this learning experience (85.2%).

The healthcare professionals and standardized patient provided feedback that the interactive peer-to-peer learning strategy was an effective method of teaching roles in healthcare. All workshop attendees indicated an interest in participating in future student-led IPE events.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The workshop evaluation suggests that students found this interactive event to be informative in highlighting similarities and differences in scopes of practice between professions. Interprofessional student-led initiatives, such as this workshop, continue to play a vital role in preparing students for practice. For example, Hoffman et al. (2008) discussed how student-led initiatives increased the willingness to collaborate in health professional practices and led to the sustainability of IPE initiatives and learning, while Cooper MacMillan, Back, and Paterson (2009), reported how students realized the value of IPE initiatives; however, they felt that current methods are not successful since these methods are often forced. Rosenfield, Oandasan, and Reeves (2009) went on to suggest that the mandatory nature of IPE may have inadvertently impacted participants' interest in attending future events. This current study, in contrast, suggests that voluntary student-led initiatives that focus on peer-to-peer learning may

Table I. Student responses to survey questions represented as percentages ($N = 27$).

Questions	Percent responding					
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strong agree	No response
1. This event helped to improve my awareness of other professions' roles in healthcare.	0	7.4	3.7	33.3	55.6	0
2. Considering the three settings improved my understanding of how others' roles may vary dependent on the healthcare setting.	3.7	3.7	11.1	40.7	40.7	0
3. Providing a case study enhanced this learning experience.	3.7	0	11.1	14.8	70.4	0
4. Was this your first interprofessional education event?	Yes		No		No response	
	40.7		59.3		0	
5. Would you attend an event like this in the future?	88.9		0		11.1	

create a more positive association as an initial introduction to IPE.

As outlined above, students reported that exploring the three practice areas improved their understanding of various professions across the care continuum. Although interprofessional frameworks are useful for understanding concepts, IPE applied in a contextual manner highlights how differences in the composition of the team or in the healthcare setting can significantly change the experience for participants. The latter was further emphasized with the incorporation of the rotating standardized patient, an element that reinforces the notion that the patient's voice is just as important as the opinions of each professional on the team. Other benefits include a greater understanding of how care planning changes across each setting and the recognition of the patient's experience as they navigate through the healthcare system.

In conclusion, this workshop provided students an opportunity to practice working in interprofessional teams while improving students' understanding of healthcare professionals' scopes of practice and how these professionals' roles change in different healthcare settings.

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Declaration of interest

The authors report no conflicts of interests. The authors alone are responsible for the content and writing of the paper.

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