

University: Faculty of Health Sciences, Curtin University of Technology

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INTRODUCTION

What is interprofessional education?

"Interprofessional Education (IPE) occurs when two or more professions learn with, from and about each other to improve collaboration and the quality of care" (Centre for the Advancement of Interprofessional Education, 2002). IPE supports Curtin's Graduate Attribute 9 of professional skills (including teamwork) and one dimension of Curtin's triple-I curriculum where students need to be able to work in an interdisciplinary context

Why change the way health professionals are educated?

The current shortage of health professionals throughout the world, the demands of a high incidence of chronic disease and a growing and ageing population, along with patients being better informed and wishing to be more involved in their care planning means that health professionals need to be more collaborative in delivering client-centred, team-based health and social care (Hargadon et al, 2000; Meads et al, 2004). To meet these challenges universities need to change the way that they prepare health science graduates. In the past students have been educated in uniprofessional silos with little if any learning from, with and about other disciplines (Barr et al, 2005). Current and future graduates need to have far greater attention paid to the development of their professional and communication skills so that they are able to work effectively and efficiently in teams of health professionals. This requires graduates to have a strong discipline specific knowledge base but also a greater understanding of the roles and responsibilities of other professions.

PROGRESS

What have we achieved to date?

Interprofessional education is viewed as the foundation for interprofessional research and practice. A number of initiatives have been established in the Faculty of Health Sciences Curtin University of Technology.

Education: In 2008 and 2009 four *interprofessional education case based learning workshops* have offered students experiences in working in multidisciplinary teams to prepare a care plan for a hypothetical case with a complex presentation. The workshops have grown organically from just two or three disciplines in 2008 (pharmacy and nursing with medicine from Notre Dame University focusing on root cause analysis; speech pathology and dietetics focusing on dysphagia management) to nine disciplines in 2009 (pharmacy, nursing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology, social work, psychology, dietetics plus medicine from Notre Dame University focusing on management of stroke). The workshops received overwhelmingly positive student feedback and plans are underway to offer further workshops in the future.

"It has helped me gain a much better understanding of what each professional does and their role as part of the multidisciplinary team"
(Year 4 Medical student)

A Health Care Team Challenge based on the initiatives of the University of British Columbia and the University of Queensland has also been conducted. This provided students with an authentic interprofessional team experience with students assigned to mixed profession teams (only one profession per team) and required to present an integrated care plan for a client in front of an audience. Students found this to be a very positive and worthwhile experience.

Research: Staff and students within the Faculty are involved in two interprofessional projects (1) Adolescent Obesity Project which involves collaboration between physiotherapy, social work, psychology, dietetics, general practice and health promotion to provide an interprofessional obesity management program for adolescents between the ages of 12 and 16 years and their parents. Students from each of the professions are involved in developing, delivering and evaluating the program as part of their research and practicum work for their courses. (2) Chronic Pain Management Project which provides an intervention that integrates psychology's mindfulness-based cognitive training with physiotherapy's functional movement training to improve outcomes in chronic back pain patients.

Practice: Final year students are involved in clinical placements in a wide range of settings including an international service learning placement for students from five disciplines (occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech pathology, pharmacy and nursing), a paediatric disability service (occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and speech pathology), an adult residential care facility (occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech pathology), a community primary care facility (occupational therapy, physiotherapy, pharmacy, dietetics, social work), a simulated learning experience in an adult teaching hospital (physiotherapy, nursing and pharmacy), and an on-campus service for adolescent and adult who stutter (speech pathology and psychology). All initiatives are linked strongly to the preparation of our graduates with particular emphasis on them applying their discipline specific knowledge in a complementary manner with students from other disciplines, developing good communication skills and professional skills as individuals and within teams with a focus on the patient and their families or carers.

"I think as a student in following placement I won't be so afraid to ask other professionals about their thoughts on something ... In my previous placements there was just me and my OT supervisor and I would only ask things directly at her and now knowing the skills of the other professions I can ask them". (Year 4 Occupational Therapy student)

"I think the biggest thing was learning how much we all complement each other's profession and we can make a session for a client much more meaningful with all of our individual input from our own professions". (Year 4 Physiotherapy student)

"Previous to this prac I would have said I was going into private practice with another speechie and now I wouldn't even consider going into private practice without having a physio and OT on board or even having these services available because it is just such a better way of working and the client gets so much more out of it". (Year 4 Speech Pathology student)

"I would say it really prepares them for actually going out and getting a job"
(Speech Pathology supervisor when asked about the benefits for students doing an interprofessional placement)



Health Care Team Challenge

What have the key challenges been?

Any initiatives that span a number of schools within a university face significant challenges including scheduling, communication, and funding. The allocation of students to interprofessional teams for fieldwork experiences was difficult due to disparate schedules across the Faculty. This has been addressed by the development of a Faculty-wide fieldwork schedule which provides several opportunities throughout the year when students can complete interprofessional placements. Staff and students frequently find it challenging to communicate within their own School so branching out to make contact with people for other schools has also been difficult. This has been addressed somewhat by the provision of a Faculty-wide Blackboard site as well as a website specifically related to interprofessional education. The funding challenge is yet to be addressed. Another significant challenge has been the demands placed on the university by professional accreditation and registration bodies. At present in Australia many of these bodies do not specifically recognise the value of interprofessional experiences which limits the number of hours students are able to spend under the supervision of staff from a profession other than their own. One of the most important factors in our success in developing interprofessional education has been the emergence of a number of champions across the Faculty who have provided great vision and energy in spreading the message both within the university and to the wider community of health practitioners.

CONCLUSIONS

The feasibility of integrating interprofessional education across the Faculty has been demonstrated by a number of successful pilot projects which have enabled students to demonstrate their ability to work in an interdisciplinary way. In the coming months these will be evaluated in more depth and a framework for embedding IPE within curricula across the Faculty will be refined. Interprofessional education needs to be valued in the university environment as one of the much needed strategies to reduce compartmentalisation and to improve the quality of health care (Majoor, 2005 cited Barr et al, 2005).

REFERENCES

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Interprofessional Workshops

Audience comments on the successful aspects of the Health Care Team Challenge

"Great program which allows communication between each profession"

"Each team had to combine their professional expertise to care for the client"

"Having students work closely together, experience small groups and encounter their differences and/or similarities"