



Featured Article

# Multidisciplinary, Team-Based Learning: The Simulated Interdisciplinary to Multidisciplinary Progressive-Level Education (SIMPLE<sup>©</sup>) Approach

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## KEYWORDS

collaborative practice;  
interdisciplinary;  
interprofessional  
education;  
multidisciplinary;  
progressive scenario;  
simulation;  
team-based learning

**Abstract:** Students in health profession programs are traditionally educated in “silos” throughout their program of study caring for patients in Episodic periods of time. Upon graduation, they are expected to function as part of the health care team, collaborating with others to care for patients from the initial point of contact to discharge. This article describes the Simulated Interdisciplinary to Multidisciplinary Progressive-Level Education (SIMPLE<sup>©</sup>) approach. The objective is to provide students from multiple disciplines the opportunity to collaboratively care for a patient from the initial point of contact through discharge following Agency for Health Care Research and Quality (AHRQ) TeamSTEPPS and best practice guidelines in a simulated learning environment.

## Cite this article:

Masters, C., O'Toole Baker, V., & Jodon, H. (2013, May). Multidisciplinary, team-based learning: The Simulated Interdisciplinary to Multidisciplinary Progressive-Level Education (SIMPLE) approach. *Clinical Simulation in Nursing*, 9(5), e171-e178. doi:10.1016/j.ecns.2011.11.007.

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## Background

Health profession students have traditionally been educated within the confines of a discipline-specific curriculum with little exposure to communicating and working with other disciplines. Health profession students do learn about the roles and responsibilities of health care team members, but because of limitations imposed by protocol at the clinical site, students are not often afforded the opportunity to

communicate directly with other members of the health care team. However, these same students upon graduation are expected to perform as part of a larger system—that of a highly functional health care team.

In response to this concern, the faculty of Gannon University's Morosky College of Health Professions and Sciences developed and implemented the Simulated Interdisciplinary to Multidisciplinary Progressive-Level Education (SIMPLE<sup>©</sup>) approach (Figure 1). The SIMPLE Approach is a multidisciplinary, team-based methodology that promotes collaboration and prepares graduates for the challenges of the real world. In the SIMPLE approach, students

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from multiple disciplines—nursing, physician assistant, and respiratory care—are introduced to the concept of collaborative practice early in the educational process. Accomplished through five phases, they become proficient in their unique role in patient care and progress to participation in multidisciplinary learning activities

focusing on the collaborative care of patients with complex issues. In this final phase, students start from the initial point of contact upon admission and progress throughout the stages of care, including treatment and discharge. Students collaborate and apply best practice guidelines following the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality (AHRQ) TeamSTEPS, a teamwork system design, to care for patients in a non-threatening environment (Agency for Health Care Research and Quality, 2011).

#### Key Points

- Multidisciplinary learning activities can be used to promote team work and provide students with the opportunity to collaboratively care for patients.
- A culture of multidisciplinary learning can be created with dedicated and committed faculty.
- Health profession students benefit from learning together.

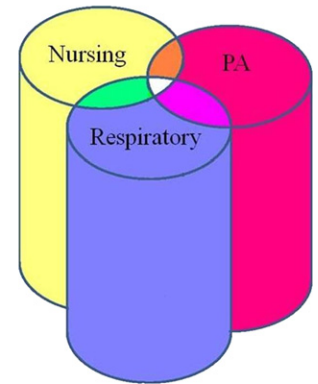
The purpose of this article is to provide the reader with a description of a curricular design that outlines the groundwork and strategies required to implement simulated team-based learning activities. For this model, interdisciplinary describes two disciplines and multidisciplinary refers to three disciplines. With recent changes in nomenclature, this article will further clarify how the SIMPLE approach incorporates interprofessional education, in which the primary goal is “to prepare all health profession students for deliberately working together with the common goal of building a safer and better patient-centered community/population oriented U.S. health care system” (Interprofessional Education Collaborative Expert Panel, [IECEP], 2011).

## Review of the Literature

Interprofessional collaborative practice, health professionals from multiple disciplines working together as a team, is the cornerstone to providing safe, high quality, effective patient-centered care (IECEP, 2011). Health profession educators have an obligation to prepare workforce-ready graduates who can assume the roles and responsibilities of interdisciplinary team members. Essential core competencies have been identified for health profession educators to prepare practitioners for interprofessional collaborative practice (IECEP, 2011). One way to achieve this goal is to engage students in interprofessional education, which occurs “when students from two or more professions learn about, from, and with each other

## SIMPLE Approach

Simulated  
Interdisciplinary to  
Multidisciplinary  
Progressive  
Level  
Education



**Figure 1** The Simulated Interdisciplinary to Multidisciplinary Progressive-Level Education (SIMPLE<sup>®</sup>) approach. The three circles denote the disciplines of nursing, physician assistant, and respiratory care. The white center is the “sweet spot,” the place where content overlaps in all three disciplines. This is where the disciplines come together to participate interprofessional collaborative patients-centered care. Used with permission © Jodon, Masters & Baker, Gannon University, 2011.

to enable effective collaboration and improve health outcomes” (WHO, 2010, p. 7).

Health profession curricula are changing from traditional isolated learning silos (Robertson & Bandali, 2008) to curricula that provide more interactive learning between and among individuals from various health professions; however, innovative strategies must be developed and implemented in health profession curricula that advance the skills and competencies necessary for interprofessional collaborative practice. Strategies such as multidisciplinary, team-based learning activities that promote effective communication, teamwork, and critical thinking can be used to promote collaborative practice.

Multidisciplinary, team-based learning involves individuals from various disciplines coming together in a collaborative and comprehensive manner for a common purpose (Dillon, Noble, & Kaplan, 2009). The beneficial outcome of multidisciplinary, team-based learning lies in the ability of students to collaboratively manage a patient throughout the continuum of care. To plan and provide collaborative care, students need to recognize the unique contribution of each member of the health team and coordinate information and processes from multiple disciplines into a holistic plan of care for the patient. Through working in teams or multidisciplinary groups, students learn how to effectively communicate and gain a greater understanding of multiple professional roles and responsibilities (Lett, 2008).

Participation in patient simulation experiences has been found to be an effective and efficient tool to enhance the learning process (Baker et al., 2008; Decker et al., 2008; Jeffries, Woolf, & Linde, 2003). Simulation provides opportunities for students to gain valuable exposure to patient

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