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Research Brief

# Simulation as an Effective Strategy for Interprofessional Education

Margaret Costello, PhD, RN\*, James Huddleston, DPT,  
Josephine Atinaja-Faller, MSN, RN, Kathrina Prelack, PhD, RN,  
Amanda Wood, RN, Jillian Barden, RN, Sylvana Adly, RN, MS

Simmons College of Nursing and Health Sciences, Boston, MA 02115, USA

## KEYWORDS

interprofessional education;  
simulation;  
quantitative research;  
interprofessional care;  
teamwork;  
interprofessional communication;  
Interprofessional Attitudes Survey (IPAS);  
Interprofessional Education Collaborative (IPEC)

**Abstract:** Interprofessional simulation provides healthcare professions students an opportunity to collaborate in a team. The purpose of this study was to examine student perspectives of an interprofessional simulation lab experience within the fields of nursing, physical therapy, nutrition, and social work. A pre-post design was employed, using the validated Interprofessional Attitudes Survey Interprofessional Education Collaborative tools to determine if there were any perceived changes in interprofessional competency and attitudes about interprofessional simulation experience. Following the simulation there were significant changes in students' attitudes in areas of cultural competence, understanding of roles, interprofessional communication and teamwork. Interprofessional simulation is a teaching strategy that shows great promise for promoting teamwork among the healthcare professions.

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## Background

According to the Institute of Medicine, nearly 100,000 deaths occur annually from preventable medical errors. Many of these preventable errors are attributed to ineffective communication and collaboration between health care providers (Kohn, Corrigan, & Donaldson, 2000). Moreover, studies show that improved patient, staff, and organizational satisfaction and patient outcomes result when care is

provided in an interdisciplinary, collaborative way (Korner et al., 2016; Tsakitzidis et al., 2016). In order to decrease the frequency of these preventable incidents and improve patient outcomes and satisfaction, patient-centered teams involving multiple disciplines would be more effective than care providers working in isolation from each other. Introducing interprofessional education to health professions studies encourages collaboration and communication between health care professionals and increases their readiness to work collaboratively with other professions during their education (World Health Organization [WHO], 2013). "Interprofessional education occurs when students from two or more professions learn about, from, and with

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\* Corresponding author: [Margaret.costello@simmons.edu](mailto:Margaret.costello@simmons.edu) (M. Costello).

each other to enable effective collaboration and improve health outcomes. Once students understand how to work interprofessionally, they are ready to enter the workplace as a member of the collaborative practice team” (WHO, 2013). One barrier to interprofessional teamwork discussed in the

literature emphasizes that education programs for health care professionals often do not address collaboration (Park, Hawkins, Hamlin, Hawkins, & Bamdas, 2014).

Learning together improves the ability of health care students to apply their knowledge and skills and put them into practice as professionals in the workplace to treat their patients more effectively (Park et al., 2014). In 2009, six national associations of schools of health professions formed a collaborative to promote and encourage constituent efforts that would advance substantive interprofessional learning experiences. The goal was to help prepare future health professionals for enhanced team-based care of patients and improve population health outcomes. The collaborative representing dentistry, nursing, medicine, osteopathic medicine, pharmacy, and public health convened an expert panel of representatives from each of the six sponsor professions to create core competencies for interprofessional collaborative practice, to guide

curriculum development and to make recommendations for interprofessional learning experiences in order to help prepare health professions students for patient-centered team-based care (Interprofessional Education Collaborative [IPEC], 2016). These competencies include topics of values, ethics, roles, responsibilities, interprofessional communication, and teamwork (IPEC, 2016).

Simulation instruction has been endorsed by the WHO as an effective method of assisting health professionals to learn how to effectively work in teams (WHO, 2013). Using simulation on a routine basis for health professions students “can teach [them] about each other’s professions and solidify the skills necessary to productively collaborate” as well as “help students to retain

and build upon skills to increase their ability to deliver safe, quality care” (Snelling & Jenkins, 2016). Simulation instruction has also been found to support the building of confidence, clinical judgment, knowledge, and competence within students (Fisher & King, 2013). A systematic review of over 700 qualitative and quantitative simulation research studies found that simulation-based education contributes to students’ learning when integrated into pre-licensure nursing curricula (Cant & Cooper, 2017). Interestingly, a review of the literature revealed few interprofessional studies that studied utilizing the core competencies. One study we reviewed found that following an interprofessional simulation of nursing and social work students that attitudes toward interprofessional learning became significantly more positive (Murphy & Nimmagadda, 2015).

To meet the needs of the changing health care landscape, with a focus on interprofessional practice, we developed an interprofessional simulation laboratory experience including nursing, nutrition, physical therapy, and social work students. Previously at our institution, simulation as a method of instruction was utilized in nursing education primarily. Our study examines student attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge toward interprofessional collaboration, utilizing tools that measure the interprofessional core competencies as recommended by IPEC.

## Sample

One hundred twenty-two nursing (33), physical therapy (38), nutrition (29), and social work (22) students at a small four-year liberal arts college in the northeast participated in a study designed to assess the relationship between student perspectives before and after completing a two and one half hour, community health, interprofessional simulation workshop. The simulation was required as part of the students’ individual professional course of study. Although students were required to participate in the simulation class, they were not required to participate in the data collection process.

## Method

The study was approved by the colleges institutional review board. Prior to the workshop, consenting students completed the IPEC Competency Survey Instrument that is designed to evaluate health profession student’s self-reported ability on each interprofessional core competency and the Interprofessional Attitudes Survey (IPAS) that is designed to assess student attitudes of interprofessional education. Both tools are based on the interprofessional core competencies. The IPEC Competency Survey Instrument is also a validated tool (Cronbach’s alpha coefficients: 0.96-0.98), and includes four categories: values and ethics, roles and responsibilities, interprofessional communication, and teams and teamwork. Subscales include shared learning (9), patient interaction (5),

### Key Points

- An interprofessional simulation study explored nursing, nutrition, physical therapy and social work students attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge towards interprofessional collaboration, utilizing tools which measure the interprofessional core competencies as recommended by IPEC.
- The study which included 122 interprofessional students, found that following an interprofessional simulation experience students had a change in attitudes regarding cultural competence, roles and relationships, interprofessional communication and teamwork.
- Simulation is an effective teaching strategy to provide experience in communication interprofessional teamwork and collaboration.

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