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Short Communication

Reflecting on care: Using reflective journaling to evaluate interprofessional education and clinical practicum experiences in two urban primary care clinics



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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the findings of a study that integrated reflective journaling into an interprofessional primary care clinical rotation to evaluate student experiences with the Interprofessional Education Collaborative (IPEC) core competencies. Student teams consisting of students from three different health profession programs (advanced practice nursing, pharmacy, and dentistry) were placed in primary care clinics to provide team-based care and led monthly case conferences focused on interprofessional collaborative practice (IPCP). Students completed an online weekly reflective journaling assignment, guided by four structured questions derived from the IPEC core competencies. Overall, 171 journal entries from 57 students were analyzed for themes correlating with the IPEC competency domains. The students' reflective journaling helped reaffirm several assumptions and observations regarding student experiences with IPE in addition to revealing insights that were not entirely expected. Students noted mostly positive experiences within the Roles & Responsibilities and Interprofessional Communication domains. Reflections on Teams/Teamwork emphasized the importance of clinic space, workflow and team makeup/consistency in facilitating teamwork. The Value/Ethics domain resulted in the least number of entries suggesting more deliberate instruction and direction may be beneficial for students. Other institutions looking to develop IPE experiences in primary care should consider using reflective journaling (specifically using the IPEC core competencies to frame the questions) as part of evaluating the student experiences.

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1. Format

Interprofessional collaborative teams of students from three different health professions were placed in primary care clinics with underserved patient populations to provide team-based primary care.

2. Target audience

Teams consisted of a final-year nurse practitioner student, a final-year student pharmacist, and a second-year dental student working under the direction of a supervising provider (employed by the clinic) in addition to a faculty pharmacist (employed by the university).

3. Objectives

In the context of interprofessional education (IPE) and

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interprofessional collaborative practice (IPCP), reflective practice has been identified as an important method toward improved teamwork, increasing trust and communication, and improving assumptions and attitudes among IPCP teams.^{1–5} Reflection and reflective journaling have been useful in developing the skills needed to engage in reflective practice within both didactic^{6,7} and clinical^{8–11} settings. Structured journals also provide students a means for discovering and reinforcing knowledge of their own profession and its relation to other health professions¹² along with gaining appreciation for the complexities and differences surrounding IPE and IPCP^{5,9} which serve to inform students' professional judgment and future actions.

The objectives of this manuscript are to describe a reflective journaling activity and provide the results of a qualitative analysis of student reflections and reactions to the Interprofessional Education Collaborative (IPEC) Core Competencies for IPCP.¹³

4. Activity description

A formal interprofessional collaboration between three health profession schools (dentistry, pharmacy and nursing) at a public university and two primary care clinics was undertaken through a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)-funded grant project (Nurse Education, Practice, Quality and Retention (NEPQR) Award UD7HP25054). The goal was to develop interprofessional student teams to provide patient-centered collaborative primary care at two community-based urban clinics located in health professional shortage areas serving urban and underserved populations. One clinic is a large Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), whereas the other is a smaller faith-based community clinic.

Each school identified faculty to identify student participants, supervise students on clinical rotations at the clinics, and participate in student-lead monthly case conferences. Depending on the program, students either applied for this experience or were assigned. Also depending on the program, IPE training and group meetings were either provided outside of the students' coursework, or embedded within an existing course. Additionally, providers were identified from the individual clinics to precept the interprofessional student teams in clinic and participate in the monthly case conferences. Due to each professional program's unique experiential education structure and schedule, nurse practitioner students participated for the duration of an entire academic calendar year, whereas student pharmacists and dental students participated for partial semesters.

Prior to starting in the clinics, students, faculty, providers and clinic administrators participated in a 3-h face-to-face icebreaker and interactive orientation session on the principles of IPE, IPCP, and the IPEC competency domains. After this orientation, student teams met 1–2 times (approximately 4 h each) per week in their assigned primary care clinic to provide team-based care. Student teams interviewed the patient (before the provider) with each health profession student having a different responsibility corresponding to his or her discipline. However, these role delineations did not preclude a student from interjecting when necessary. After conducting the initial interview and physical exam, student teams reported back to the provider and faculty pharmacist to discuss their findings and develop a patient-specific plan. Afterwards, the provider and student team saw the patient to complete the visit.

In addition to clinic sessions, students, faculty, and clinic providers participated in a 2-h monthly case conference. Each month, one interprofessional student team was responsible for facilitating a case presentation on a patient they saw and worked together on in the clinic that exemplified the importance of IPCP. Students were responsible for discussing the traditional clinical elements of a

patient case presentation, in addition to barriers related to patient follow-through, ethical issues, and ways the interprofessional team provided improved patient-centered care (over a uniprofessional approach); thus covering each IPEC core competency.

5. Assessment

In order to evaluate student experiences with the IPEC competencies in the clinical setting, students were asked to complete an online weekly reflective journaling assignment, guided by four structured questions, developed by the authors, and designed to address each of the IPEC core competencies (Table 1; one question for each IPEC competency domain). Students were asked to complete all of the questions after each week of the clinical rotation through an online data entry tool in Google Forms (Google Inc., Mountain View, California). This assignment was voluntary, with reminders given throughout the semester. This investigation was determined to be exempt by the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institutional Review Board.

6. Evaluation

The project ran from August 2013 through May 2015, with five cohorts of students (Summer 2013, Fall 2013, Spring 2014, Fall 2014, Spring 2015). After completion of the overall study, de-identified journal entries were downloaded from the online server. A total of 57 students provided 171 journal entries reflecting on their IPCP experiences. Directed content analysis was used to review the journal entries, meaning that data are reviewed and matched against an underlying and organizing theory.¹⁴ Each of the present study's authors (except HG) independently reviewed journal entries for two IPEC domains for overarching themes, resulting in one person from each school vetting each IPEC domain. After independent review, all authors discussed the identified themes and easily came to unanimous consensus regarding which entries correlated with the IPEC competency domains (less than 3% of entries required a consensus discussion). Although qualitative analysis methods do not define "adequate" sample sizes, upon review of the transcripts, the authors concluded that theoretical saturation¹⁵ had been reached, as no new information was being delineated with successive entries. An analysis of the themes with representative quotes is described.

7. Impact

The students' reflective journaling helped reaffirm several assumptions and observations regarding student experiences with

Table 1
Reflective journaling structured questions.

IPEC competency domain ¹³	Question
Values/Ethics (VE)	Provide an example of how you had to make a decision that called into question your own belief about something, or in which a colleague from another profession made a decision that you did not readily agree with, and how you negotiated the situation.
Roles/Responsibilities (RR)	Provide an example of how your profession has been viewed as an asset or a hindrance. If positive, why? If negative, what did you do to remedy the situation?
Interprofessional Communication (IC)	Provide an example of how communication with other professionals went well or was a barrier (and if a barrier, what you did to help the situation).
Teams/Teamwork (TT)	Provide an example of what helped or was a barrier in working with others on your team.

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