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Experiences in Teaching and Learning

A team-based interprofessional education course for first-year health professions students

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ABSTRACT

Background and purpose: Interprofessional education (IPE) is required within pharmacy education, and should include classroom-based education along with experiential interprofessional collaboration. For classroom-based education, small-group learning environments may create a better platform for engaging students in the essential domain of interprofessional collaboration towards meaningful learning within IPE sub-domains (interprofessional communication, teams and teamwork, roles and responsibilities, and values and ethics). Faculty envisioned creating a small-group learning environment that was inviting, interactive, and flexible using situated learning theory. This report describes an introductory, team-based, IPE course for first-year health-professions students; it used small-group methods for health-professions students' learning of interprofessional collaboration.

Educational activity and setting: The University of Toledo implemented a 14-week required course involving 554 first-year health-sciences students from eight professions. The course focused on the Interprofessional Education Collaborative's (IPEC) Core Competencies for Interprofessional Collaboration. Students were placed within interprofessional teams of 11–12 students each and engaged in simulations, standardized-patient interviews, case-based communications exercises, vital signs training, and patient safety rotations. Outcomes measured were students' self-ratings of attaining learning objectives, perceptions of other professions (from word cloud), and satisfaction through end-of-course evaluations.

Findings: This introductory, team-based IPE course with 554 students improved students' self-assessed competency in learning objectives ($p < 0.01$, Cohen's $d = 0.9$), changed students' perceptions of other professions (via word clouds), and met students' satisfaction through course evaluations.

Discussion and summary: Through triangulation of our various assessment methods, we considered this course offering a success. This interprofessional, team-based, small-group strategy to teaching and learning IPE appeared helpful within this interactive, classroom-based course.

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Background and purpose

Motive

Per the World Health Organization, interprofessional education (IPE) occurs when students from two or more professions learn *about, from, and with* one another.¹ However, engaging students early in health professions education about the importance of interprofessional collaboration can be challenging, given the sizable number of students within and variability of academic schedules among health-profession programs. Despite these challenges, accreditation standards (such as pharmacy's doctor of pharmacy [PharmD] standards²) require IPE to be integrated longitudinally throughout classroom-based and experiential education curricula of professional education programs.

Rationale

Traditionally, classroom-based coursework has been lectures, with limited active-learning to engage students.³ Small-group instruction and discussion, where vocal students are less able to dominate discussion while quiet students cannot hide from participation, is one option to better facilitate active-learning and engagement from all students. In a systematic review of studies using small-groups for teaching and learning, Kilgour and colleagues⁴ reported a beneficial effect of small-group teaching on student satisfaction and concluded that use of small-groups was a preferred teaching method. Small-group sessions can have potential to increase student engagement *and* increase student satisfaction towards improved academic performance.

Based on this need for classroom-based IPE, faculty from the University of Toledo determined that teaching and learning IPE should be accomplished using interprofessional small-groups. Using situated learning theory,^{5,6} this course was based in guided participation; faculty noted it as context-bound and desired a focus to create substantial social interaction within interprofessional small-groups of students. Thus, the entire class of 554 first-year health professions students representing eight programs (medicine, nursing, pharmacy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, physician assistant studies, respiratory therapy, and speech language pathology) were divided into interprofessional teams of 11–12 students each. While large-cohort single-session IPE activities have been reported previously in the pharmacy education literature,⁷ this report describes how one institution implemented an entire semester-long IPE course using small-group teaching and learning, including many PharmD students among several health-professions. The purpose of this article is to detail specifics of implementation for this introductory, interactive, classroom-based IPE course for 554 first-year health-professions students at the University of Toledo.

Educational activity and setting

Overview

This large, interactive, classroom-based IPE course (554 students) was implemented during the first semester after matriculation for each of the eight participating health profession programs at the University of Toledo. [Table 1](#) shows the number of students from each profession for this initial year the IPE course was offered. This course was planned by a core group of interprofessional faculty

Table 1
Demographics of course participants and matched self-assessment responders.

Profession (Degree)	Students	Participants in Course	Participants with Matched Pre- & Post-Self-Assessment Responders	
Medicine (MD)	175	32%	61	33%
Nursing (RN & MSN)	112	20%	40	21%
Occupational Therapy (OTD)	20	4%	10	5%
Pharmacy (PharmD)	108	19%	40	21%
Physical Therapy (DPT)	28	5%	13	7%
Physician Assistant (MS in Biomedical Sciences)	45	8%	22	12%
Respiratory Therapy (BS in Respiratory Care)	17	3%	1	1%
Speech-Language Pathology (MA in Speech-Language Pathology)	48	9%	0	0%
Total	553	100%	185	100%
Female	352	65%	120	64%
Male	196	35%	67	36%
Total	553	100%	187	100%

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