



Activities designed to simultaneously meet discipline-specific course objectives and interprofessional education competencies



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1. Introduction

Interprofessional education (IPE) has been identified as an essential and effective strategy for training future healthcare professionals to work collaboratively to improve patient outcomes.^{1–3} Common strategies for implementing IPE include dedicated didactic programs, paper cases, standardized patients, simulated laboratory activities, patients in realistic or real-life settings, service learning, clinical rotations, shadowing experiences, and code blue emergency drills.^{4–6} However, many of these require faculty training, and curricular development.⁷ This seems to be particularly true of those designed explicitly for the sole purpose of creating an IPE opportunity. Aligning IPE activities with concurrent course content has the potential to achieve both discipline-specific and IPE objectives, while providing IPE with context and significance at every stage of the learner's professional development. The purpose of this article is to present a set of IPE experiences, involving four healthcare professions that were developed and embedded into existing courses within each of the professional curricula involved, and were designed to simultaneously achieve both discipline-

specific course objectives and IPE competencies.

2. Description of activities

In response to an IPE initiative, faculty representatives from each of the healthcare professions met and discussed potential IPE opportunities with a focus on areas of curricular overlap. Overlapping content areas were identified by faculty from the physical therapy (PT), pharmacy, physician assistant (PA) and nursing programs who then collaborated to create three IPE activities that could address these curricular areas effectively. Each faculty member identified specific courses with objectives relating to the areas of curricular overlap and embedded the IPE activity within the course. Some of these objectives aligned explicitly with IPE competencies and others were unrelated. Two of the activities involved peer teaching and one activity involved telecommunication. Peer teaching is supported in the literature as an effective strategy for providing IPE resulting in a significantly higher perception of professional cooperation⁸ and enhanced confidence and professional role identity.⁹ Following each activity, students were invited to complete program specific surveys that included items specific to the discipline-specific course objectives and to IPE competencies. IRB approval was granted for this study.

2.1. IPE activity 1: assistive device training

Pharmacy and PT curricular content intersected in the provision of assistive devices for ambulation.

2.1.1. Format

Physical therapy students instructed the pharmacy students in accurate fit and gait patterns for use with canes, walkers, and crutches. Criteria for referring to PT were discussed, and scenario based discussion provided the framework for clinical decision

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making relating to device prescription. Pharmacy students then demonstrated accurate fit and provided appropriate instruction of gait patterns to other pharmacy students.

2.1.2. Target audience

Thirty six second-year doctor of physical therapy (DPT) students and 163 third-year doctor of pharmacy students participated in this reciprocal peer teaching IPE experience.

2.1.3. Objectives

For both programs, the two IPE competencies identified as a focus of this activity were communication and roles and responsibilities. The PT-specific course objectives related to interdisciplinary communication, and the ability to create instructional units that are current and relevant for presentation to students. The pharmacy-specific course objectives related to communication and professional roles, as well as the appropriate use and fitting of assistive devices.

2.1.4. Activity description

The students were divided into small groups made up of four to five pharmacy students and one PT student. The session lasted 2 h and took place in the university gym, which was set up with standard chairs, walkers, crutches and canes for each group. Physical therapy students provided instruction in selection, correct fit and appropriate gait patterns with each of the assistive devices. They also provided psychomotor training, scenario based discussion to provide the framework for clinical decision making relating to device prescription, and discussed criteria for referring to PT. All students were provided instructional handouts. This activity identified the overlap and differences in respective roles and scope of practice for both professions in the context of gait training, while providing a meaningful context for practice of interprofessional communication. The session was supervised by course faculty, who provided guidance or correction only when necessary.

2.1.5. Assessment

Assessment of newly learned skills was achieved using a check-off which was completed by the PT student for each pharmacy student who demonstrated competence ([Appendix A](#)). Content knowledge was assessed through written examinations in the aligned courses.

2.1.6. Evaluation

Both IPE objectives and discipline-specific objectives were evaluated using surveys of student perceptions of the impact and effectiveness of the experience. Surveys were administered using Survey Monkey ([Tables 1 and 2](#)).

Survey results from both groups of students were largely positive. For the PT students, the survey questions related exclusively to IPE objectives as competence in gait training had been established in earlier semesters. All PT students agreed or strongly agreed that the experience provided a good opportunity to practice communication and collaboration. Ninety percent felt the activity effectively presented PT roles and responsibilities in relation to assistive devices, while only 70% felt that they increased their understanding of the pharmacist role. Ninety percent of PT students felt respected by the pharmacy students in their group. The pharmacy student responses were overwhelmingly positive with the majority of the students (92–95%) agreeing or strongly agreeing with all survey statements. Five of the survey questions related to IPE objectives, specifically roles and responsibilities and communication and collaboration. Two of the questions related to discipline-specific objectives including the use of, and counseling of patients regarding assistive devices. In contrast to the PT students, none of

whom strongly disagreed with any of the statements on their survey, 3–4% of pharmacy students disagreed strongly with each of the questions on their survey indicating that a 5–7 out of 163 students were dissatisfied with all aspects of the experience.

2.2. IPE activity 2: patient transfers

Physical therapy and nursing curricular content intersects in the area of safe patient handling.

2.2.1. Format

Physical therapy and nursing faculty designed an interprofessional laboratory session in which PT students instructed the nursing students in safe bed mobility and manual transfer skills.

2.2.2. Objectives

A PT course occurring concurrently had objectives assigned to the effective instruction of students, communication and collaboration with a variety of healthcare partners, and injury reduction during patient handling. Similarly, a concurrent nursing course had objectives relating to communication, safety and interprofessional behavior. The combined faculty identified communication, team and teamwork, and roles and responsibilities as the IPE topic areas that were highlighted during this activity.

2.2.3. Target audience

One hundred and forty six junior level Bachelor of Science in nursing (BSN) students in their first week of the first semester of their program and 37 second-year DPT students participated in this activity.

2.2.4. Activity description

During this 90 min session, students worked together in three simulation laboratories in the nursing department at 20 stations that were set up to simulate hospital rooms. There were four nursing students and two PT students at each station. Physical therapy students instructed nursing students in bed mobility (rolling, scooting in bed, transitioning from supine to sitting and the reverse), one and two person stand and pivot transfers from the bed to a chair and the reverse, and stretcher transfers. Physical therapy students provided the nursing students with a written handout that reviewed the principles and application of each mobility activity. A PT and nursing faculty member were present in each of the simulation laboratories to provide general supervision. Both groups of students were exposed to each other's professional roles and skills in patient care in the context of safe patient handling. Discussion about the benefits of collaboration for patient and provider safety occurred within each group.

2.2.5. Assessment

Discipline-specific objectives identified in each program's concurrent course were assessed using traditional methods of evaluation that included written and practical examinations.

2.2.6. Evaluation

The effectiveness of the IPE activity was assessed using surveys developed by faculty from each discipline ([Tables 3 and 4](#)).

Three of the questions on the PT student survey related to discipline-specific objectives and all were overwhelmingly positive; 100% agreed or strongly agreed that they were prepared for the activity, that it prepared them for mobility training activities in clinical settings, and that it developed instructional skills. The four questions relating to IPE objectives were also positive with 100% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that the experience benefited communication and collaboration, respect among

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