Students’ Perceptions of Roles on a Health Care Team
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Research Question

Does a single inter-professional learning activity with a standardized patient (SP) enhance health science students’ understanding of roles on a health care team?

Preliminary Results

Three main themes emerged from the focus group data. These themes, and the relationships between them, are shown in Figure 1.

Value of the Standardized Patient

All participants were enthusiastic about the team interaction with the SP. It was expressed that involvement with a SP made the activity more meaningful. “I definitely don’t get the same thing out of reading a case study.” Three sub-themes were identified.

Realism: “I love doing stuff that’s real!”
Participants felt that the interaction with the SP increased the applicability of the learning activity to their future practice and made the situation feel clinically relevant. One participant also said that talking to the SP as a team was important because it provided an opportunity to differentiate between personality traits and professional roles.

Patient Leadership: “the patient was the one that was guiding us...”
Methods applied prior learning about patient-centered care to the organization of their interaction with the SP. Asking the SP to identify her issues of concern focused the team’s discussion, helping to clarify discipline-specific roles.

Communication Skills: “if you have a SP, then we learn how to communicate with the patient as well.”
One participant said that she will be able to apply what she learned in terms of “what other professions have to say and their ideas...” She added that interaction with the SP promoted learning of communication skills with patients as well as team members.

Comprehensive Patient Care

Participants engaging in a clinical scenario as an inter-professional team allowed them to “really see how it all fits together.” Three sub-themes were identified.

Complementary Roles: “if you don’t have an answer, somebody else will... you’re supporting each other...”
Participants agreed that working as a team with the SP enabled them to find multiple solutions to common issues of concern. They reported interest in learning about treatment approaches used by members of different disciplines.

Role Overlap: “[other’s roles] don’t just get forgotten, but other people will absorb them...”
All participants noted the effect of team composition on professional roles within a health care team. Some participants reported new learning about roles that had seen...” “my thoughts that were...”

Role Appreciation: “the OT sees something completely different from what I saw...”
One participant expressed that an intra-professional approach falters patient care by de-emphasizing the knowledge, skills, and perspectives that professionals from other disciplines can provide. Participants recognized that each discipline offers a unique perspective on a patient’s situation.

Context-Specific Learning

In terms of discipline-specific roles on a health care team, many participants expressed that the learning activity “just reiterated what I had seen...” during other IPE opportunities. Participants felt that their learning was specific to the scenario: “my thoughts that were different were just basically related to the situation...” Several participants reported learning about new strategies, techniques, or resources specific to the clinical scenario from their colleagues.

Discussion

Preliminary results, based on focus group data, indicate that the participants’ understanding of roles in a health care team was enhanced through a single inter-professional learning activity with a SP. Yet, upon completion of the team learning activity, most participants reported that they “didn’t really have much new learning” about professional roles. This contrast may be related to a number of factors including limited time for reflection prior to the focus group, the participants’ backgrounds in IPE, and the participants’ assumptions that increased role knowledge should be acquired over several interaction-specific periods.

To enhance general understanding of professional roles, the participants suggested that they would benefit from a series of inter-professional team activities focusing on different case scenarios. Although there is debate in the literature regarding the optimal timing for IPE, all participants in this study arrived at a common conclusion. They suggested that IPE should occur during the late years of professional training. As articulated by one participant, “I don’t think that IPE should start at the very beginning of professional training...we should be a bit more nervous about my part...I wouldn’t want to exposure that I don’t know a...”

Working through a case scenario that mirrors a real-life situation has the potential to improve communication in student health care teams, allowing members to share knowledge and skills that members of other disciplines contribute to patient care. Adult learners respond most positively to IPE when they perceive a direct relevance between the learning activity and their current or future practice.

To enhance general understanding of professional roles, we would like to: a) enhance students’ awareness of the importance of IPE through a case scenario, b) provide opportunities for teams to reflect on their experiences during other IPE opportunities, and c) support the guidance on Debbie Docherty, Anna O’Riordan and Dr. Margo Patterson have provided throughout the research process. Support for this research was provided in part through student stipends from QUIPPED (Queen’s University Inter Professional Patient-Centred Education Direction).

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References


