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# An Online Approach to Interprofessional Education

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## **An Online Approach to Interprofessional Education**

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Despite increasing interest in providing interprofessional education (IPE) opportunities for health profession students, the logistics of scheduling and integrating diverse curriculums remain challenging. Several models to address these potential barriers have been proposed and utilized (Blue et al, 2010). Faculty from three colleges within Thomas Jefferson University developed an asynchronous online interprofessional course as one solution to overcome logistical barriers to IPE.

Interprofessional Grand Rounds is offered to third year pharmacy students and second year occupational therapy (OT) students in the fall semester. The course utilizes a variety of learning activities to evaluate the influence of current public health and psychosocial issues on the United States healthcare system. The content is divided into modules which address current healthcare issues such as evidence-based decision making relative to patient preference and provider autonomy, the TeamSTEPPS® approach to optimizing patient safety by enhancing communication and teamwork skills, technology use in healthcare and end of life care. In addition, first year students from the Department of Physical Therapy (PT) and College of Nursing join the course for one module on patient safety and error reduction.

Students are assigned to an interprofessional community of learners which participates in conversations about each course topic via Wiki discussions. Module topics are open for two weeks. During the first week, students read the original Wiki and post a response to one or more of the guided questions. The next week, students post a reply to a fellow student's post. Students must provide a current reference to support each post. This encourages them to search for additional information and use evidence to support their opinion. By reading the current evidence, students enhance their understanding of each topic. Through reply postings, students practice team communication skills and learn the perspectives of other professions. Each community of learners creates an original Wiki on a topic of interest. Sample topics include bias and stigma regarding mental illness, patient refusal of medical treatment at end of life, and refusal of immunizations.

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During the TeamSTEPPS® module, students are given a patient case and must create and post a short video vignette of themselves using one of the TeamSTEPPS® communication strategies to address a patient safety concern. This learning activity provides students the opportunity to apply what they have learned. As part of the End of Life Care module, students attend an in-person half day interprofessional symposium where they interface with students and faculty from other departments in the University (medicine, nursing, PT, couple and family therapy). Together they explore the interprofessional approach to supporting patients and families during times of difficult decision making. Students write a one page reflection paper on their experience at the symposium.

Interprofessional Grand Rounds has been offered twice. A total of 110 pharmacy and 31 OT students have enrolled in the course. In addition, 330 nursing students and 124 PT students have participated in the patient safety module. Course evaluations from the first year indicate that 77% of students agreed or strongly agreed that joining with other professions for the module on patient safety added to their understanding of patient safety issues, and 81.1% of students agreed or strongly agreed that participating in the interprofessional patient safety module improved their understanding of the unique perspectives and roles of other professions. Among pharmacy and OT students 87% agreed or strongly agreed that creating the video for the TeamSTEPPS® Wiki was beneficial in helping them learn to apply the strategies. On open-ended questions on course evaluations, multiple students identified the interprofessional components of the course as strengths. Students appreciated the opportunity to hear the viewpoints of and interact with students in other professions and attend the interprofessional symposium. Faculty review of the course after the first year revealed that the vast majority of students were able to think critically about the topics discussed and provided Wiki comments that added original information, perspectives or questions to the discussion. Students were able to demonstrate one TeamSTEPPS® technique, reflect on their experience at the end of life symposium, and create an original Wiki that fully explained and provoked student discussion on a current controversy or issue in healthcare. Faculty members appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with and learn from interprofessional colleagues.

Asynchronous online courses such as Interprofessional Grand Rounds are one solution to the challenges of bringing together students from diverse curriculums for an interprofessional experience. Working collaboratively, faculty created innovative, valuable learning activities to enhance students' ability to critically analyze relevant and contemporary issues in healthcare delivery while developing team building and communication skills necessary for clinical practice.

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