



IDEAS AND INFLUENCES

What is the place of interprofessional education in supporting the continuum of care for patients?

Annette Solman

Health Education and Training Institute, New South Wales, Australia
Email: Annette.Solman@health.nsw.gov.au

Submitted for publication: 21st April 2016
Accepted for publication: 22nd April 2016
Published: 18th May 2016
doi: 10.19043/ipdj.61.014

Keywords: Interprofessional learning, interprofessional education, person-centred practice, integrated care

Advances in science and technology mean more people are living longer, resulting in multimorbidity and increasingly complex presentations later in life. People require healthcare that may include hospital admission, community-based care, social care and private healthcare input to support integrated person-centred healthcare. The aim of integrated care is to improve the quality of care and patient outcomes, so interprofessional education is on today's health agenda and research is required to establish how best to structure it in the undergraduate setting and for the existing workforce that provides healthcare and supportive services.

Interprofessional education occurs when healthcare professionals from two or more disciplines learn about, from and with each other to promote effective collaboration and improve health outcomes (World Health Organization, 2010). The WHO has issued a call to action for undergraduate studies to include interprofessional learning, and to create a suitable workforce, a two-pronged approach is required. First, the inclusion of selected shared-subject learning across undergraduate education programmes, for example in communication and social sciences, and second, a focus on what the existing healthcare workforce requires to be able to work and learn in an interprofessional way across government and non-government agencies to achieve the best outcomes. The development of existing staff requires educational material and experiences that reflect their everyday practice and patient journeys. Such an approach will enable the building of links between the different agencies that support healthcare, and the creation of patient-centred healthcare systems within and across traditional healthcare boundaries.

Person-centred practice requires an environment that values and supports the need to plan for and deliver healthcare provision that meets the changing needs of patients and their families. It is vital that staff understand their own and others' roles in the development of such an environment. The traditional hierarchy of roles needs to be challenged; the person who takes the lead in planning a patient's care may change, depending on the individual's needs and on staff members' experience. But whoever takes the lead role should be able to draw on the particular knowledge of other team members when planning care.

To date, there is little robust research linking interprofessional education/learning with changes in collaborative behaviour that improve healthcare and system outcomes. To be effective, interprofessional education needs to be coordinated, with planning shared by educators, health system leaders and policymakers (Cox and Naylor, 2013).

McCormack and McCance (in press) provide a framework for conversations about interprofessional collaboration and learning. This can assist in the design, delivery and evaluation of curriculum development and the resulting outcomes at undergraduate and postgraduate level, with a goal of creating workplace cultures that value interprofessional learning, collaboration and the involvement of patients and families, as well as government and non-government agencies.

Suggested further enablers include:

- Establishing from patients, families and staff the current and preferred culture and devising a plan to work towards identified changes
- Creating an interprofessional learning environment that encourages team skills, providing constructive feedback and an appropriate attitude to other professions
- Designing education materials from real practice scenarios, with the voices of patients and families included
- Ensuring stakeholder involvement in curriculum design and in the implementation and evaluation of educational material to support interprofessional practice
- Having an assessable component in educational programmes, with constructive feedback
- Selecting work placement opportunities for exposure to different environments across the continuum of care
- Evaluating interprofessional education programmes for their effectiveness over time, with modifications made based on feedback from patients, families and other stakeholders
- Involving the regulatory health bodies in this work to ensure registration of programmes where the work will be accredited

Key questions you may want to ask yourself and others:

- What is your commitment to interprofessional education in undergraduate and healthcare settings, and what do you see as the enablers to support this way of working?
- What principles should govern the development, delivery and evaluation of interprofessional/cross-agency education?
- What motivates you to be involved in interprofessional education?
- How might research further inform providers of care of the value of interprofessional education and practice?

Interprofessional practice is an area of opportunity to change the ways patients and carers experience healthcare and to strengthen the relationship across government and non-government agencies to enhance the health and wellbeing of our communities.

References

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Annette Solman (Masters NR, BaHSN, DipHSN, Cert ICU, RN), Chief Executive, Health Education and Training Institute, New South Wales, Australia.