Proposed Program

The importance of implementing an IPE program stems from important issues that arise within the healthcare system. For instance, when it comes to communication, skills are taught to students that focus on interactions with patients and families from the perspective of his or her profession, instead of an integrated approach from all healthcare professionals. This then leads to them beginning their careers with interprofessional barriers of unfamiliar vocabulary, different approaches to problem solving and a lack of common understanding of issues and values. Furthermore, “vital linkage” has been identified within teams where staff often times becomes confused as to where one’s practice boundaries begin and end which results in some team members feeling undervalued or other members having to take on more of the workload than they should. Unfortunately, there are risks for high burn out and for conflict unless good leadership and conflict resolution skills can be addressed. These issues on communication as well as conflict resolution skills could be implemented within an IPE program early on in their career, so that when they get to that point of their career, they would already be trained on how to work with conflicts that arise from professional responsibilities.

The program provides the chance to embrace those wanting to exceed expectations beyond what is required and therefore more strongly add to the current generation of healthcare workers being turned out proficient in interprofessional teamwork.

Methods

The Medical University of South Carolina chose the topic of interprofessional education for its 10-year Quality Enhancement Plan required for re-affirmation of accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Positive Example: The University of Colorado each use a series of patient-based case studies, community clinics, web modules, and mannequin-based joint simulations to interact with other nursing, pharmacy, and physical therapy students to foster a cohesive approach towards patient care.

Positive Example: The Medical University of South Carolina chose the topic of interprofessional education for its 10-year Quality Enhancement Plan required for re-affirmation of accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

The Lack of Institutional Collaborators - limited professional schools in their institution to partner with, or potential partners who are unwilling to take on an interprofessional agenda.

Positive Example: Vanderbilt University has reached out to two other universities to add pharmacy and social work students, enhancing the experience of the medical and nursing students, indeed all students, in the new Program in Interprofessional Learning.

Potential Setbacks

Institutional Level Challenges - lack of top administrative leadership support for adequate resources to create an interprofessional program to health professions students’ education.

Positive Example: The University of Texas at Austin has an annual interprofessional education faculty development program and consults with other institutions to assist in faculty development.

Faculty Development Issues - Extra training for health professional training; the content and process of interprofessional learning differs from other academic content they teach.

Positive Examples: The Medical University of South Carolina’s Faculty Development Institute is competitive throughout the University, and it’s promotion and tenure guideline support involvement in interprofessional education. The University of Texas has an annual interprofessional education faculty development program and consults with other institutions to assist in faculty development.

Keys to Success

Early planning. Obtaining student input during the planning phase and encouraging student leadership. Taking account of cultural differences across disciplinary units. Obtaining community support for projects located off-campus in a local community setting. Paying explicit attention to teamwork. Partnering with the AHEC Education Center (AHEC) system.

Conclusion

It must be the standard that all healthcare professional schools strive to have an IPE program in order for individuals to better understand the role and capabilities of the entire healthcare team. IPE programs allow students to network with peers that they will someday work with and help form a lasting respect for the duties of other professions. The interprofessional profession as a whole would benefit from the building of interprofessional communication and cooperation. This understanding will exponentially improve today’s healthcare system for patients and create a cohesive group that will be greater than the sum of its parts.

References listed in addendum