

Interprofessional education: Enhancing the teaching of medication safety to nursing, pharmacy and medical students

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It is in the formative years of undergraduate education that attitudes are forged and skills imparted which shape the quality of engagement with patients for years to come
~ Bristol Report (2001)



- The problem:** Medication safety is a global concern with interprofessional education (IPE) recognised as vital for preparing nursing, pharmacy and medical students for their roles in the medication team. However, in Australia IPE is seldom used for teaching the communication skills inherent in medication safety, despite evidence indicating that inadequate communication between health care professionals is the primary issue in the majority of medication errors.
- Cause of the problem:** Educational strategies aimed at single disciplines are limited in their ability to prepare students to work as part of a complex health care team. Timetabling restrictions, resource implications and large student cohorts often prevent students from learning together.

Communications errors are identified as the root cause of 70% of sentinel events in health care
~ Joint Commission (2004)
- The context:** A pilot study involving nursing students (n = 350), pharmacy students (n=90), and medical students (n = 24), was undertaken in the Faculty of Health in the University of Newcastle, Australia.
- Intervention:** An innovative learning resource was developed to tell the 'story' of "Eileen Poole", a patient, who encountered various health professionals in her journey through the healthcare system. Eileen's story was told through a series of film and audio clips depicting encounters with a Practice Nurse, a General Practitioner, a Community Pharmacist, and nursing, medical, and pharmacy staff in an acute hospital setting. The resource included critical thinking questions, as well as discipline specific questions to facilitate deep learning.
- Strategy for change:** The learning resource was introduced in 2010 as a nine week tutorial series for nursing students; as a two week intensive tutorial program for pharmacy students, and a self-directed learning package for medical students.

Interprofessional education occurs when students from two or more professional groups learn about, from or with each other to enable effective collaboration and improve health health outcomes
~World Health Organization (2010)
- Measurement of improvement:** The Readiness for Interprofessional Learning Scale (RIPLS) was used to explore students' attitudes towards IPE and the value and authenticity of the resource.
- Effects of changes:** Students' responses to the learning resource were positive (mean 4.8/5). Students believed that the resource portrayed a 'real-life' situation, were more engaging than paper-based case studies and enhanced their communication skills. The resource led to an enhanced understanding of teamwork and respect for the roles of other health professionals. The students felt that the messages conveyed through the video clips about patient safety were clear and thought provoking.
- Lessons learnt:** The resources were effective in achieving learning objectives. Difficulties were largely associated with technological applications; practicalities of large file download, compatibility of viewing formats, and sound quality from different computers.

Health care workers who are educated and trained to work together can reduce risks to patients
~L-TIPP (2009)
- Message for others:** Well developed, user-friendly multimedia resources are an effective, pragmatic way to achieve the objectives of IPE and teach medication safety, while avoiding the difficulties of scheduling IPE in face-to-face formats. Further research with different contexts and contexts would be useful in extending upon this project.

Acknowledgments:

Support for the development of this resource has been provided by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The views expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

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