Training Competent Interprofessional Practitioners

As students and practicing professionals move through their careers, their professional identities evolve. One of the goals of interprofessional education (IPE) is to shape those professional identities so that the individuals view their own practice as more interwoven with work of other professionals. In this issue of The Common Thread, we focus on our conceptual framework for professional development and how different educational experiences support creating a more interprofessional professional identity.

The image for the conceptual framework is a tree which serves as a map of learners moving from the roots as pre-professionals to the leaves as practitioners. At the level of the roots, learners enter health professions education with diverse backgrounds. Some were inspired to pursue a health-related career by a great classroom teacher while others have been touched by illness and entered the health professions for more personal reasons. Regardless of the reason why each student enters health professions education, he or she is motivated to become an excellent practitioner.

At the next level, the trunk of the tree, students are now enrolled in a health professions program. While the students in each program are targeting a specific career, what they are learning is similar: anatomy, physiology, basic clinical assessment skills. Although the students know their career destination, they have only a beginning concept of their profession’s professional identity. In a sense, students are more similar than different at this point. IPE should be designed to shape the concept of professional identity and leave room for each student to grow as their training unfolds.

As the student’s education continues, they begin to develop a professional identity. They can function with supervision in real clinical settings. Or they can represent that profession in simulated educational settings. Now, IPE can focus on shaping the specific behaviors of future practitioners in specific fields. The learners begin to be actual healthcare teams.

Finally, at the most advanced level, health care professionals are not just defined by professional scopes of practice but also the contexts in which they practice. Health care practitioners from similar professions may have dramatically different practice; for example, consider the practice of an operating room nurse versus a home health nurse. Here, IPE is about developing that learner into a more effective interprofessional practitioner in that setting. Learning and practice are intertwined and inherently contextual.

This issue features examples from our educational programs that function within this model. We hope these add depth and prove thought-provoking.
Conceptual Framework for Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Care

Community-based Collaborative Care for Older Adults
Patricia Slattum, Pharm. D., Ph.D., VCU School of Pharmacy

“To truly make interprofessional collaborative care a reality, learners across professions need hands on opportunities to solve real world problems and experience interprofessional teamwork in action. We are developing and evaluating collaborative care and educational programs focused in senior housing in metro Richmond to achieve these goals. Care coordination efforts provide students and faculty opportunities to work directly with other health professionals and students to learn more about the roles and value of each discipline’s perspective, to practice communication with other providers and with patients, and to address complex needs and social determinants of health—all while addressing an important need in our community.”

Emswiller Interprofessional Symposium
Victor Yanchick, Ph.D., VCU Center for Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Care

“We have created a forum for practitioners, faculty, and students to learn from each other about innovations in interprofessional practice and education. Attendees from around the country share their experiences and insights to inspire and strengthen each other’s commitment to providing the best health care for their patients and communities.”

IPEC 501 - Foundations of Interprofessional Practice
Colleen Lynch, RN, MSN, CPHQ, CPPS, VCU School of Nursing, and VCU Center for Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Care

“IPEC 501 will be offered for the first time in Spring, 2016. The course is a requirement for students in the Schools of Medicine, Nursing and Pharmacy and has been developed by an interprofessional team of faculty over the past several years. The course represents a collaborative effort by the participating health professions schools to move uniprofessional quality improvement and safety content from existing curricula to this new interprofessional course, which as a whole will be greater than the sum of its parts. This course will enable interprofessional student teams of students to learn about major causes of error from each discipline’s perspective and to work together to develop improvement strategies for current safety and quality challenges.”

Pre-Clinical Learners

Context-Specific Experiences Practitioners

Profession-Specific Experiences Advanced Learners

Foundational Experiences Early Learners

Interprofessional Critical Care Simulations
Tanya Huff, M.S., RN, CCRN, CCNS, CNE, VCU School of Nursing

“By having graduating nursing and medical students collaborate around the care of critically ill simulated patients, we prepare them for those first few days working in the hospitals as nurses and residents. Over two weeks, the students work together for six hours on about fifteen cases where they learn what situations they can handle on their own and with what situations they need help. The students love working with each other, and we really see them become a better team as the sessions unfold.”

Interprofessional Virtual Geriatrics Case
Peter Boiling, M.D., VCU School of Medicine

“Students from nursing, pharmacy, social work and medicine work together through a semester-long virtual geriatrics care case. In teams of six, they share profession-specific perspectives and collaborate as a group to determine the best course of action for the patient. At the end of each of the four units, students receive feedback from faculty and each other about their performance. The virtual case provides students realistic opportunities to practice collaboration in a simulated environment and learn how best to work together as a team.”

Interprofessional Critical Care Simulations Lab
Students from VCU Schools of Medicine and Nursing in the Interprofessional Critical Care Simulation Lab.

The 2015 Emswiller Symposium, Changing Practice, Improving Outcomes, attracted attendees from across the U.S. and around the world.

The 2017 Emswiller Symposium, Common Thread, Expanding Outcomes, aimed to bring together students from across the U.S. and around the world.
Director’s Message

Leading the Center for Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Care can be a challenge. Between our programs that educate and train, our programs that deliver care, and our community that we serve, there are many moving parts and perspectives to understand. Just when I think I have something figured out, there’s usually a new angle to consider. Although the successes and rewards have been great, at times the challenges can make me feel like I am floundering. I note how humbling this experience has been for me for this reason: in this issue, we presented our model for developing an interprofessional professional identity. As a practicing physician, my professional identity is out on some distant terminus of a tree branch. Yet, even there, I find myself continuing to learn and grow as a physician and a leader. For that, I have to thank my colleagues, my students, and my patients who provide the stimulus for me to become better at what I do. And, that seems to be the point of all of our professional journeys. Thank you for being my travel companion.

Alan Dow, MD, MSHA is the Assistant Vice President for Health Sciences for Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Care, and Professor of Internal Medicine in the VCU School of Medicine.

Save the Date

The changing healthcare environment requires frontline innovation from healthcare providers to improve the health of the population, decrease the cost of care, and enhance the patient experience. The Fourth Annual Emswiller Interprofessional Symposium will take place on Saturday, February 6, 2016 at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Henrico, VA. Invited are:

- abstract submissions
- excellence in interprofessional education student nominations
- sponsorship opportunities

More at: go.vcu.edu/ipeconference

Fourth Annual Emswiller Interprofessional Symposium

“Leading Interprofessional Innovations in a Changing World”
Saturday, February 6, 2016 • Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Henrico, Virginia

Early bird registration until December 4, 2015

Symposium Objectives
At the conclusion of the Symposium, attendees will be able to:
- Describe the changes in the practice environment supportive of increased interprofessional practice
- Summarize evidence-supported innovations in interprofessional practice
- Identify educational approaches to develop a workforce prepared for interprofessional practice

Keynote Speaker
Christine A. Aronson, MD
Associate Professor and Co-Director,
Senior Adult Oncology Center
Thomas Jefferson University

Information & registration: go.vcu.edu/ipeconference