

Interprofessional learning between medical and social work students at a student-run clinic

INTRODUCTION

Student-run free clinics (SRFCs) perform an important role in providing medical and social services to patients that might otherwise go without. They are lauded as opportunities for interprofessional learning and practice. However, few studies have critically examined the interprofessional teamwork attitudes and practice in SRFCs where social work and medical students both serve patients.

OBJECTIVE

To describe the attitudes towards interdisciplinary care among MD and MSW students at a student-run free clinic.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What perceptions of interdisciplinary care emerge from interprofessional practice of students from multiple professional schools in a student-run free clinic?

How could collaborative care be integrated into multidisciplinary team learning and/or practice in this setting?

METHODS

- Individual interviews with student doctor teams and current/former social work students were conducted by researchers using standardized, open-ended interviews.
- Interview guides asked questions regarding individual definitions of interprofessional & collaborative care, interprofessional attitudes, and direct clinical experiences/patient encounters.
- Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and report overall patterns within these data.

Overall, both medical students and social work students at this SRFC spoke positively of working with one another and acknowledged the importance of each other's perspectives.

However, differences did exist between student perspectives:

MEDICAL STUDENTS

- Primarily identified "team-based care" as practice model used
- Did not immediately identify non-medical students as "team members"
- Managed the hand off of patients from medical care to social work care
- All recognized importance of "social determinants of health" but prioritized medical needs, unless impossible to address without addressing social problems

SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

- Clearly defined "holistic" and "interdisciplinary" as the practice models used
- Identified themselves, medical students, and community partner case managers as part of care team
- Highlighted medical students were "in charge".
- Recognized their contribution of specific knowledge set around complex social welfare processes (charity care, Medicaid, SSDI, e.g.)



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me412@rwjms.rutgers.edu
nmilano@ssw.rutgers.edu

RESULTS

- 6 M3/M4 medical students
- 3 former MSW student interns

"I remember hearing doctors don't appreciate social work... and that was not my experience at all.. I felt an overall openness and respect and appreciation" - Former MSW student intern

"We are limited in how connected to the community we sometimes are. The SW student has boots on the ground in terms of having ears on the ground and being in touch with resources and really the nuances of how to navigate the health care system ... that are essential to patients to basically live their lives" - M4 Current Student Doctor

CONCLUSION

Interprofessional attitudes were positive between medical and social work students. Despite differences in understanding "teams" or differing views of care priorities for patients, conversations suggest that student-run free clinics do provide interprofessional learning that is beneficial to the development of collaborative skills. Results also highlight the need for additional education about the various definitions of interdisciplinary models of care to promote effective collaboration in eventual employment positions.

 Michael Enich, Nicole Milano, MSW, LSW, Karen Wei-ru Lin, MD

