"The story of inter-professional learning ….. we don't speak to each other!"

Trainee nurses and doctors don't speak to each other, even within one institution. No-one speaks to the trainee pharmacist! Yet when these students graduate they will work in 'health care teams'. This study asked 'how can we better prepare students for inter-professional practice?' A nationally-funded pilot project, ePrePP, was implemented and gained insights into this question through student and tutor surveys and focus groups. ePrePP focused on work placement within three health-care disciplines (nursing, pharmacy and medicine), and five higher education institutions. An eportfolio facilitated students in sharing work, giving and receiving feedback, and reflecting on and monitoring their own progress. The project identified common competencies required of nursing, pharmacy and medical graduates. These provided the focus for assessment, feedback and building capacity to see from multiple perspectives. Open access resources were developed to stimulate inter-professional learning before/during/after student placements. Participants will be invited to discuss ways forward for IPL.

750 words

Context and research question:

In University College Cork students studying specific programmes within the medicine and health science disciplines have traditionally had little contact with related disciplines (nursing, pharmacy, medicine, etc.). Programmes are self-contained and stand-alone. Yet when students enter professional practice they must work in 'health care teams' considering the patient in a more holistic way (Reeves et al, 2009).

In each of the health science disciplines the syllabus for undergraduate study is heavily influenced by the individual national professional body requirements (for nursing, pharmacy, medicine, etc.) who mandate certain competencies that must be achieved if a graduating student is to get professional recognition. Each programme therefore independently designs opportunities for students to gain these competencies and demonstrate the level of achievement.

A competitive proposal for funding from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning to operationalise the ePrePP project (Preparation for Professional Practice) was successful. This study ran in parallel to investigate "how can we better prepare students for inter-professional practice?". Since work-placement is an essential element of most health science programmes, and has high potential for inter-professional learning, we focused on this aspect of the undergraduate experience to explore the research question from a number of perspectives.

Method:

Three health science disciplines in University College Cork, nursing, pharmacy and medicine, joined forces to attempt to implement change and address the research question. A plan for a pilot implementation of the ePrePP project was developed in collaboration with four other higher education institutions. This involved the introduction of an eportfolio to facilitate and manage various forms of assessment and feedback that could encourage IPL. International experts were enlisted to review the plan and advise on implementation. A community of students, academic tutors, and professional work-place tutors, as well as learning technologists and senior managers, were brought on board for this pilot.

Each discipline brought certain expertise to the implementation that was of benefit to the other disciplines (with stories of student portfolios, competency mapping, assessment of competencies, and good practice in work placement). Appropriate modules were identified for the pilot

implementation in the institutions. Digital resources, in the form of real patient experiences, were produced and edited into chunks to be used to stimulate inter-professional learning, and to be used flexibly to facilitate assessment and feedback of shared core competencies.

An eportfolio was introduced for the first time as a tool to help students collect and store evidence of competency achievement before, during and after work-placement. In some cases students acted as partners to pilot the eportfolio alongside a paper-based portfolio, and/or presented their experiences for debate at conferences.

Survey instruments were developed (adapted from McNeill & Cram) to collect quantitative and qualitative data and gain insights from students, academic tutors and work-placement professional tutors. Six focus groups were held to collect further qualitative data. Data analysis looked for 1) evidence of impact on student lPL and 2) lessons learned to inform future implementation.

Findings:

The individual competency frameworks developed for each health science discipline have competencies in common. This was not a surprise, but what was a surprise is that the frameworks have not been overlaid before now to identify the common core competencies. These common competencies created synergies and gave the disciplines a focus when designing opportunities for inter-professional learning. They assisted the project team to get buy-in from a wider academic tutor cohort, and gave professional work-place tutors a clear vision of what the student wanted to achieve while under their supervision.

Insights into the research question were gained from three key perspectives, student, academic tutor, and work-placement professional tutor. This paper will tell the story of impact and lessons learned from these three perspectives. Although most stakeholders saw the purpose of the project and were willing to engage in opportunities for inter-professional practice, there was some resistance. Where purpose was not clear, stakeholders felt the work was too much for little benefit. Increasing the awareness of purpose increased the intentionality of tutors and students to focus on IPL. The open-access resources developed were powerful in allowing students to reflect on patient scenarios from perspectives of members of a 'health care team' before, during and after work-placement. The main obstacles identified were structural challenges, though some modifications to pedagogical approach were deemed necessary. Participants will be invited to discuss what advice we can offer to National professional bodies to inform the roll-out of new or revised competency frameworks with a focus on inter-professional learning.

McNeill, M. & Cram, A. (2011). "Evaluating e-portfolios for university learning: Challenges and opportunities". Ascilite, p. 862-873.

Reeves, S., Zwarenstein, M., Goldman, J., Barr, H., Freeth, D. Hammick, M. & Koppel, I. (2008). Interprofessional education: effects on professional practice and healthcare outcomes. The Cochrane Library, Issue 1, p.1-21.