

Student perspectives of the multidisciplinary experience

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Best practice in health care is moving increasingly towards the use of evidence based treatments (EBT) and a holistic approach to the individual. The former is consistently practiced in medicine, whereas the latter is integral to the discipline of psychology. It seems natural as a future psychologist and physicians, studying at the University of Ottawa, that we look to each other's disciplines to maximize the effects of our research and clinical skills.

Our academic careers led us to collaborate on a project in the field of pain and HIV, where we investigated the psychosocial and physical impacts of pain. Our team consisted of psychologists, physicians, and community members living with HIV. In true multidisciplinary fashion, we discussed cross-discipline collaboration and what it means to us as students.

The Psychological Perspective

Through my experience with this team I have come to realize what psychology has to offer to other disciplines; it goes beyond the stereotyped therapeutic interventions that often first come to mind. The research abilities ingrained in the profession of psychology, and statistical knowledge in particular, were invaluable to our team. My definition of what a psychologist is has expanded; skill sets that seemed commonplace to me were seen by my team members as unique and professionally defining. Experiences in multidisciplinary teams can help us, as students; realize the variety of expertise that psychology has to

offer to other disciplines, and how this expertise can fit in with the skill sets of other professions. Furthermore, early positive experiences between psychology and other disciplines pave the way for future collaborations that ultimately benefit our professions as well as those who seek our services.

The Medical Perspective

In the past, medicine has been a hierarchical profession, where the physician treated the physical symptoms, largely ignoring psychosocial factors, and hesitantly involving other health professionals. Exposure to these fields has led us to an increasing appreciation for the holistic model of health and the value of collaboration. Optimal treatment of chronic diseases (i.e. HIV/AIDS), in particular, warrants an equal playing field among a variety of health care professionals.

As discussed by Antony (2008) the field of psychology does not universally incorporate evidence based practices. As medical students trained to incorporate EBT in clinical decision making, we were able to assist the team by sharing our experiences with our colleagues. Additionally, we learned that the most important aspect of working in a multidisciplinary team is cultivating professional respect. Engaging in professional relationships with members of other disciplines is not only beneficial for health care professionals, but most importantly for the patient who trusts us with his or her care.

Conclusion

Despite the evident value of multidisciplinary team work, it may be difficult to gain exposure to other areas of health care, particularly as students. Nevertheless, acquiring such experience is most definitely possible, especially if interested students take it upon themselves to seek such opportunities. One way to cross professional boundaries is by attending conferences and workshops, many of which are based upon a topic of interest but not necessarily a professional affiliation; these are ideal for multidisciplinary interactions. Moreover, students can seek summer or part-time employment/volunteer opportunities as part of research or health

care teams comprised of individuals with varied backgrounds.

Ultimately, as the health system evolves, we are driven towards a comprehensive model of care in which professionals of all types work together towards a common goal – to provide the best possible care to their patients. Thus, we encourage students to embrace multidisciplinary teamwork to the fullest extent.

Reference

Antony, M. (2008). Graduate training in evidence-based practice. *Psynopsis*, 30(4), p. 4.