

SHORT REPORT

Assessing faculty attitudes after participation in an interprofessional teaching scholars programme

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ABSTRACT

Promoting interprofessional education (IPE) and practice is a priority in academic health centres; however, implementation of IPE can be challenging. Recognizing the need for faculty development in teaching, and specifically IPE, the University of California, Davis Schools of Health launched the Interprofessional Teaching Scholars Program (ITSP) in 2014. Two cohorts of 11 faculty scholars each completed the nine-month programme and participated in this longitudinal comparative study in which pre- and post-assessments using a validated survey instrument were administered to measure changes in faculty attitudes towards IPE and collaborative practice. There was a statistically significant increase in the summated scores on all three of the subscales: Attitudes Towards Interprofessional Health Care Teams, Attitudes Towards IPE, and Attitudes Towards Interprofessional Learning in the Academic Setting. The results suggest that the ITSP was associated with positive changes in faculty attitudes related to interprofessional collaboration and teamwork.

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Evaluation research; faculty development; interprofessional education; surveys

Introduction

Interprofessional collaboration and teamwork are rapidly becoming the standard in health care delivery. This report describes an evaluative study of the University of California, Davis (UCD) Interprofessional Teaching Scholars Program (ITSP), a nine-month faculty development programme focused on the development of educational leaders with a strong commitment to interprofessional education (IPE), research and practice.

Background

To promote collaborative practice in the workplace, IPE must be a priority in health professional education institutions (World Health Organization, 2010). Health professions educational accreditation bodies increasingly address IPE within professional curricula and continuing education programmes (Zorek & Raehl, 2013). The delivery of IPE, however, can be a challenging process, requiring strong facilitation among interprofessional educational leaders (Anderson, Thorpe, & Hammick, 2011; Steinert, 2005). Traditionally, educators tend to be experts in their own fields and are well qualified to teach within their professions, but rarely receive training or mentorship in teaching students of other professions or creating IPE programmes. IPE requires a shift in faculty attitudes toward innovative teaching in order to facilitate understanding rather than delivering content (Abu-Rish et al., 2012). Therefore, an effective IPE programme requires leaders who are well versed in educational scholarship and current teaching and learning practices (Thibault, 2013).

Implementation of a successful IPE programme is dependent on the development of critical faculty leaders; however, faculty development related to IPE receives limited attention in the research literature (Abu-Rish et al., 2012). The extant research recognizes the complexity and non-traditional nature of the faculty role in delivering IPE and the need for in-depth and ongoing faculty development (Reeves, Perrier, Goldman, Freeth, & Zwarenstein, 2013). The WHO Study Group (2010) recommended that faculty training for IPE should focus on increasing faculty understanding of other professional roles and responsibilities, and developing specific IPE skills to teach to students. Essential IPE faculty development addresses IPE, collaborative patient-centred practice, teaching and learning, and leadership and organizational change (Steinert, 2005). Curran, Sharpe and Forristall's (2007) research with 194 Canadian faculty members from medicine, nursing, pharmacy and social work indicated that nursing faculty, female faculty, and those with previous IPE experience expressed more positive attitudes toward IPE than medical faculty, males, or those with limited IPE experience. Their study highlighted the importance of assessing faculty attitudes toward IPE and interprofessional teams in order to evaluate IPE initiatives within an academic health care setting.

The UCD Interprofessional Teaching Scholars Program (ITSP), which began in 2014, is a collaboration between the UCD Schools of Nursing and Medicine. Participation in this nine-month faculty development programme is voluntary and selection is competitive. Selection is based on creating a diverse interprofessional cohort of scholars from all levels of career development who are committed to quality teaching and educational leadership. The programme includes 30

three-hour seminars, covering a broad range of topics related to five curricular components: interprofessionalism, teaching/learning, educational scholarship, diversity/inclusion, and leadership. Three sessions are specifically focused on interprofessionalism, including interprofessional theory, teaching and learning strategies, leadership and scholarship. Additionally, interprofessional aspects are integrated into most of other sessions, including literature, research support and examples from a variety of health professions. This prospective study was conducted as part of the UCD ITSP programme evaluation to specifically assess the effect of the ITSP on participant attitudes related to IPE and teamwork.

Methods

A longitudinal comparative study was conducted over 2 years, including two cohorts of 11 faculty each who all completed the nine-month programme.

Data collection

All of the 22 faculty scholars enrolled in the ITSP between 2014 and 2016 participated in the study, including 14 physicians, three nurses, three basic scientists, and two physician assistants. The sample included 14 women and eight men. Each of the cohorts were surveyed prior to beginning the programme and following completion of their programme, using the 42-item scale of attitudes related to interprofessional teamwork and learning developed and validated by Curran and colleagues (2007). Participants were asked to rate their views on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The voluntary confidential surveys were administered electronically through the course learning management system.

Data analysis

The data from both cohorts were combined and analysed using IBM SPSS (v. 24.0) including descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alphas and two-tailed Related Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests.

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the UC Davis Institutional Review Board prior to data collection.

Results

The internal consistency reliability analysis of the survey instrument revealed Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each of the three subscales ranging from 0.76 to 0.89, consistent with Curran et al.'s (2007) original findings. The individual survey item medians ranged from 2.0 to 5.0. The Wilcoxon analysis revealed that median post-test scores were significantly higher than the median pre-test scores on all three subscales: Attitudes Towards Interprofessional Health Care Teams (pre-test Mdn = 58.5, post-test Mdn = 63.0, $Z = 156.5$, $p = 0.013$, $N = 21$), Attitudes Towards IPE (pre-test Mdn = 64.0, post-test Mdn = 70.0, $Z = 137.5$, $p = 0.023$, $N = 20$), and Attitudes

Towards Interprofessional Learning in the Academic Setting (pre-test Mdn = 50.0, post-test Mdn = 55.0, $Z = 180.0$, $p = 0.005$, $N = 21$). The slight differences in the sample size for each of these analyses were due to a few instances of missing data. The median difference in pre- and post-scores for 18 of the 42 individual items was significant ($p < .05$) with all reflecting an increase in positive interprofessional attitudes.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that a teaching-focused, nine-month interprofessional faculty development programme may be associated with positive changes in participant attitudes regarding interprofessional teamwork and education. These findings are consistent with those of Curran et al. (2007) and others, indicating overall positive attitudes towards IPE in academic settings.

Limitations of this study included the small sample and the predominance of physician participants, which precluded the testing of differences in attitudes between professions or genders. The study was also limited by the fact that it was conducted at a single institution, and thus the results may not be generalizable to other settings. Additionally, while there were significant improvements in faculty attitudes related to interprofessionalism, the long-term effect of the ITSP on changing practice or education is yet to be evaluated.

Further research is needed to corroborate these findings using a larger sample, including other health care professions in different academic settings. These results point to the success of the ITSP at UC Davis and suggest that implementation of similar programmes could promote IPE at other academic health centres. The first 2 years of the ITSP has been impactful in creating a collaborative group of educational scholars and future leaders who are committed to quality education. The ITSP could serve as a model for other educational institutions striving to promote IPE and excellence in health professions education.

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Declaration of interest

The authors report no conflicts of interest. The authors alone are responsible for the content and writing of this article.

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