The Importance of Interprofessional Learning (IPL) for Patient Safety

Interprofessional learning (IPL) has been described as:

“when two or more professions learn with, from, and about each other, to improve collaboration and the quality of care.”

UK Centre for the Advancement of Interprofessional Education, CAIPE

“IPL can contribute to patient safety where it enhances understanding of: profession roles; shares approaches to learning; and explores different learning and teaching preferences. This contributes to increased awareness of the impact of human factors on safety that include human and individual characteristics which influence behaviour at work, including aspects of communication, team dynamics and team learning. Poor communication between team members and with patients or carers, can impact negatively on patient safety.”

Fiona Gailey, Educational Projects Manager, NHS Education for Scotland
Learning from elsewhere

During 2006-2007, a project to introduce IPL into clinical areas using the existing practice learning teams was piloted.¹ It was funded jointly by the former Learning in Practice Unit in Nottingham and the University of Nottingham. Practice learning teams were used to provide interprofessional opportunities for healthcare students in the clinical area and became interprofessional practice learning teams. Evaluation of this pilot identified the following benefits of this approach to patient care:

“Realisation of how closely these teams have to work together and how each profession is directly dependent on the other to provide a good and effective treatment for the patient concerned.”

Physiotherapy Student

“Useful to discuss patients’ care with other healthcare professional students and formulate plans based on a team’s input as they will (hopefully) be part of my everyday job.”

Medical Student

“It allows better communication between the different professions and better understanding of each others’ roles. This can only contribute better quality of care for patients, more effective working and quicker/better discharge.”

Student Nurse

We need to work together to establish education strategies that enhance collaborative working, along with profession-specific skills to produce a highly skilled, proactive, and respectful work force focused on providing safe and effective health for patients and communities.

BMJ Quality and Health care²

Our IPL Masterclass

The NES South East Multi-Professional Team (SE MPT) developed an innovative approach to supporting interprofessional education, training and supervision through the development and facilitation of IPL Masterclasses between 2008 and 2011. The aim of these Masterclasses was to bring together healthcare workers from a range of professions, to explore teaching methodologies and strategies suitable for IPL within practice settings. They involved GP trainers, nursing and allied health professionals, practice education facilitators, dental trainers and other staff involved in facilitating learning.

The Masterclasses were facilitated by an interprofessional group from general practice, dentistry, nursing and midwifery, and allied health professions. The facilitators role-modelled the tools and techniques used to maximise participants’ experiential learning.

Using the Kirkpatrick model³ of training evaluation (The Kirkpatrick Four Level Evaluation Model looks into Level 1 – reactions of an event/learning activity, Level 2 – learning against agreed learning outcomes, Level 3 – how behaviour has changed as a result of the learning and Level 4 – how the learning has impacted on business or environmental outcomes), the courses were then qualitatively and quantitatively evaluated, including: pre- and post-knowledge scores; self-rated confidence; and in-depth interviews regarding the application of the learning in the workplace.

¹ http://www.nursingtimes.net/using-interprofessional-learning-in-practice-to-improve-multidisciplinary-working-/5008024.article
How our IPL Masterclasses are contributing to making care safer

In general, IPL aims to improve patient safety, enhance patient satisfaction, increase levels of innovation in patient care and increase staff motivation, well being and retention.

Staff who completed the IPL Masterclass reported that they felt empowered with the skills to deliver IPL in the workplace. Key to this was adoption of a more person-centred approach to interprofessional teaching, moving from a purely theoretical understanding of learning to being able to apply and modify their approach according to the needs of patients and other professionals. One medical consultant said he thought it would influence patient care as he now felt better prepared to teach his juniors and also to teach his patients.

_Ultimately the main benefit of IPL is to patient safety and quality of care. There is an evidence base supporting team working, learning and development. This in turn contributes to safer care._

Paula Ingram, Practice Education Co-ordinator
NHS Education for Scotland

Sustaining and promoting the benefits of interprofessional learning

Given the positive impact the IPL Masterclass course has had on facilitating learning in practice, and the associated links with quality of care, former members of the NES SE MPT contributed to the development of a toolkit, so that the resources developed by the IPL Masterclass facilitators can continue to be used. The Train the Trainers Toolkit (Helping Others to Facilitate Learning in the Workplace: A Practical Guide) is a training programme which can be delivered by experienced trainers/facilitators to help others facilitate learning in the workplace.

The following topics are covered:

- adult learning
- teaching and learning styles
- teaching a practical skill
- giving feedback
- effective group work
- planning learning sessions
- managing difficult behaviours in groups
- how to evaluate
The Scottish Government has set ambitious Health Service targets including the elimination of avoidable harm to patients. Education has an essential role to play which should not be overlooked just because it is difficult to quantify the impact of staff education on patient outcomes. Patient Safety education scenarios build on the established success of patient stories in using narrative and qualitative data as powerful levers for improvement. The scenarios in our portfolio demonstrate the impact of educational interventions on healthcare staff whilst caring for their patients.

Professor Philip Cachia
Chair, NES Patient Safety Multi-disciplinary Group,
Postgraduate Medical Dean