Simulation offers a safe, controlled environment in which students can learn effective collaboration and teamwork.

Healthcare professionals have long recognized the need for interprofessional education (IPE), but never has this need been more pressing. In the last few years, our healthcare system has undergone a major redesign. This redesign, combined with science and technology advancements and patients’ increasing complex healthcare needs, underscores the need for nurses to work within an interprofessional team to provide safe, effective care.

Not only are nurses the single largest group of healthcare professionals, but they also spend the most time in direct patient care. Their vital role enables them to influence progress in healthcare delivery and press for a culture of collaboration and interdisciplinary care. Such influence should begin in the educational setting in the form of IPE. This article discusses IPE in undergraduate nursing programs using simulation and describes how to integrate simulation into the curriculum.

Understanding the need for IPE
IPE involves students from two or more health professions learning together during all or part of their professional education. The National League for Nursing, Institute of Medicine (IOM), and American Association of Colleges of Nursing unanimously support improved interprofessional communication and collaboration in healthcare. These organizations have issued a call for action to initiate interprofessional collaboration in the academic setting before students enter the workplace.

Acknowledging that ineffective communication and poor interprofessional cooperation negatively affect best practices and outcomes, the IOM's 2010 report The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health suggested that “by improving interprofessional efforts, which include the development and evaluation of interprofessional education...models reflecting best practice, patient errors could be greatly reduced and patient safety improved.”

Although the need for interprofessional collaboration in healthcare is obvious, students from various health professions still lack interaction in the educational setting. Many organizations support IPE in preparing students to provide interprofessional care to patients after graduation. But nursing, medicine, and other health-related fields rarely combine courses, use the same faculty, or participate in formal IPE. And once students graduate and begin working, they're less likely to communicate and collaborate, potentially putting patients at risk.

Integrating IPE through simulation
Research shows that efficient teamwork and communication are needed to prevent and reduce human errors that lead to poor outcomes. Using simulation to implement IPE allows health profession students to learn effective teamwork and collaboration and develop positive attitudes toward one another before actual patient-care experiences. Research on simulation in health professional education has increased, but such use is primarily intraprofessional, with each discipline
learning individually without collaboration among disciplines.

To prepare students and new graduates to work together in an interdisciplinary team, simulation must be integrated across all nursing and health professions curricula. Simulation allows students to gain experience and exposure in working together as an interdisciplinary team in a safe setting without risk to patients.

Evidence from current studies supports the use of IPE through simulation in undergraduate nursing programs. The evidence emphasizes students’ perceptions and readiness to participate in IPE. For instance, many students reported the desire to practice communication skills between physicians and nurses to prepare for real-world practice, and valued the ability to practice skills in a safe environment. Those involved in IPE simulation said they gained more knowledge and improved their communication skills. Among prelicensure students prepared for IPE through simulation and other experiential learning modalities, simulation was found to be an effective method for implementing IPE into education.

**How to implement simulation successfully**

Implementation of IPE simulation should take place within the health sciences department of colleges and universities that offer nursing, allied health, medical programs, or a combination. However, for such education to succeed, the different professional schools must collaborate. Educational leaders and administrators need to support these efforts and provide adequate resources, such as funds for equipment and personnel, proper space for simulations, and staff training.

For successful implementation, faculty from the different programs should ensure the experience meets all students’ needs and should coordinate schedules for the various disciplines to meet together. Many health profession programs already have simulation lab experiences integrated into the curriculum. Combining the experiences into an interprofessional simulation could reduce the financial burden on individual programs.

Providing opportunities for IPE simulation in undergraduate nursing programs nurtures positive student attitudes and roles in the interdisciplinary team. Evidence shows students are ready and willing to participate in IPE through the safe, controlled environment that simulation offers. Simulation increases their recognition of the need for efficient teamwork and communication skills.

Continued efforts in research and development of IPE simulation are needed to change current educational practices. These efforts will better prepare new graduate nurses to work as part of an interdisciplinary team—with safe, effective, high-quality patient care as the ultimate goal.

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