Diving into the Deep End:
A Reflective Review of an Interprofessional Community/Academic Partnership

Fairfield, Connecticut

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Introduction

Partnership: Beginning in the Fall of 2016, an Interprofessional Academic and Community Partnership was proposed to Sacred Heart University (SHU).

Academic: Sacred Heart University, College of Nursing, Fairfield, CT

Community: Western Connecticut Health Network (WCHN) which encompasses Norwalk, Danbury, and New Milford Hospital. Community Care Teams (CCT) were developed in 2015 to bring together community agencies and the hospitals to offer navigational services to meet the goals of restoring patient functioning, improve overall health and wellness outcomes, and to determine appropriate healthcare services for this underserved population (homeless or use the emergency room for primary healthcare). (Rigg, 2015)

Proposal: SHU and WCHN join forces to provide an interprofessional educational experience for students and community leaders with the driving vision of providing population-focused healthcare in the community.

Partnerships

What happens when you say "yes" to spearheading an Interprofessional Community/Academic Partnership? It is an experience that can be compared to "learning how to swim". Like learning anything new, the participant at first may need to swallow an awful lot of water before realizing one must learn the fine intricacies of the actual act of swimming. In this case, interprofessional education and community partnerships are key elements in developing and implementing a clinically based collaboration where the needs of many are in high demand.

Understanding these key elements allows the new swimmer to embrace the uniqueness of working alongside multiple individuals with a variety of professional academic, community, and healthcare backgrounds. Luckily, the new swimmer is surrounded by professional "lifeguards" within their own collegial support system which allows for a feeling of safety, security, and support. Additional guides and competencies are also available to offer substantial information which will allow an evidence based practice approach to developing and implementing the partnership (AAHC, 2015; IECEP, 2016; AHA, 2016; RWJ, 2017).

Program Development: WCHN/SHU   iCAN Program
(Interprofessional Community Academic Navigation)

Program development began as soon as the proposal was first introduced in the Fall of 2016. Multiple meetings were attended by all team members to determine the first phase goals and learning objectives of the interprofessional partnership. Phase One was developed with the intention of beginning the clinical experience in the Spring of 2017. At that point in time, the College of Nursing was the sole academic partner that was taking part in the program. During the beginning stages, discussions began with other academic disciplines to determine if other members of the university would be interested. Since this was close to the beginning of the Spring Semester, departments were limited on which students would still need a clinical placement such as in the iCAN Program. Occupational Therapy (OT) was added to the interprofessional team made up of 2 RN to BSN and 2 OT students.

Phase One
Spring Semester 2017: Jan. 9th - April 28th

Goal:
The WCHN-SHU iCAN Program will, under the guidance of WCHN clinical staff, bring together students from the College of Nursing (CON) and Occupational Therapy Program at Sacred Heart University. As a team, they will engage high-vulnerability, high-need community residents with the goal of education, linkage to care and increased self-efficacy. This interprofessional collaboration will serve as a means to coordinate efforts to assist in the navigation of services and educational activities in and out of the community.

Learning Objectives:
1. Conduct a needs assessment.
2. Develop a plan to address the gaps in services.
3. Implement the plan: "outside the box" thinking to address the gaps in care.
4. Provide direct outreach to community residents.
5. Collect outcome data.
6. Take a medically and psychiatrically informed history.

iCAN Team:
The team will consist of:
                    *SHU Academic Team Leads
                    *WCHN Community Leads
                    Student Community Navigators (SCN):
•Two Registered Nurses currently working within the WCHN system as well as studying within the SHU/CON RN to BSN Undergraduate programs.
•Two Occupational Therapy Graduate students

Reflective Discussion

Phase One of the Development and Implementation of the iCAN Program
Concerns:
1. How can such an overwhelming task that would take multiple members to accomplish be fully developed and implemented by Spring 2017?
2. How can a group of professionals possibly come together to meet the needs of this ever-growing underserviced population?
3. Will students receive the type of clinical/field experience needed to fulfill the requirements of their professional degrees?

Reflection:
As the team came closer together, we realized the opportunities and the limitations that were simultaneously being showcased. Fortunately, the student team and lead navigator found the experience to be fulfilling and added to their current practices. Positive benefits to the partnership were glimmering through the ocean of possible Phase One outcomes.

Conclusions

As the Spring Semester 2017 and Phase One of the iCAN Program comes to a close, valuable lessons have been learned throughout the experience:
1. Give you and your team time and understanding when developing an interprofessional partnership. We all are learning from each other, be patient!
2. Know your goals and be flexible with adjusting those goals along the way.
3. Good and bad things will happen in any developing program. We need to learn from these and consider them an experimental time towards a very bright and effective partnership.
4. Admit you don't know. Not everyone will be experienced in interprofessional education and partnerships. It is literally like diving into the deep end and not knowing how to swim.
5. Seek guidance from colleagues who are experienced in interprofessional activities. Attend conferences such as IPEC to further develop your program…keep on learning!

Future Developmental Goals: Revised Interprofessional Team Makeup, Outcome Data, iCAN Curriculum, and Research/Publishing Opportunities

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•Staci Peete, MSW (Lead Navigator Norwalk)

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