

## Using simulation in teaching interprofessional team skills to undergraduate rural health students

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**Introduction:** Improving teamwork and communication amongst in health care has been linked to higher quality of care and improved patient outcomes. Interprofessional learning (IPL) is useful in promoting collaborative practice and has relevance to rural practice where health professionals often work collaboratively. Using simulation in IPL sessions encourages student engagement, provides realistic, flexible and interactive learning opportunities, creating an in-depth and sustained educational experience.

**Methods:** Health professional academics at University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health in Taree presented an IPL module using simulation and didactic presentation to forty-six undergraduate students from medicine, nursing, pharmacy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and diagnostic radiography. The aim was to improve the students understanding of communication and teamwork, drawing on the TeamSTEPPS model.

Firstly, six interprofessional groups of students were formed and performed a teambuilding task and short videos were used to demonstrate positive and negative teamwork attributes, highlighting the importance of non-technical skills to effective teamwork. Each group then participated in a different simulation—discharge planning, a teenage pregnancy, fracture in a community pharmacy, contrast media reaction, dealing with hospital hierarchy, and the emergency response team. Debriefing of groups took place in a combined forum, to reinforce the learning and highlight key concepts to all.

**Results:** Of the 41% who completed evaluation questionnaires, 58% were previously aware of multidisciplinary teamwork but gained new information, and 11% indicated that the information about teamwork was completely new to them. Even though education about teamwork was not new, 90% felt more likely to refer patients based on information learned in the IPE module. Most (85%) felt more inclined to work in a multidisciplinary team-oriented environment. Further, 16% of respondents learned strategies to manage conflict within a team. All of the respondents said simulation enhanced their learning experience in the module.

**Conclusions:** Evaluation suggests that the students gained a great deal from participating in the IPL Module, even if communication and teamwork education was not new to them. However, most teamwork education takes place in mono-disciplinary groups, with no opportunities for interprofessional interaction. Students agreed they were more likely to collaborate with other health professionals as a result of this IPL experience. Much greater use of IPL should be considered in interprofessional team-building, especially when students are on placements in rural locations. Furthermore, the key concepts of multidisciplinary teamwork, communication and conflict resolution can be well demonstrated using simulation learning techniques.