

## **Helping health professionals learn from each other for better patient care** **Interprofessional education stresses team approach**

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HEALTH AND MEDICINE

Society's concept of how patients are treated is changing. Today, patient-centred care is the focus in both clinical and educational environments where physicians, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers and other health professionals work as a team in decision-making.

Nowhere is this team-based, collaborative approach to patient care more evident than in U of T's health science and social work faculties through their [interprofessional education \(IPE\) initiatives](#). Interprofessional education is defined as occasions when two or more professions learn from and about each other to improve collaboration and the quality of care. It helps students develop the competencies needed to work together to provide appropriate care to patients, their families and the community.

Professor Catharine Whiteside, interim dean of the Faculty of Medicine, says IPE has become more relevant over the last few years because of the social accountability agendas of the provincial and federal governments which focus on health team practice in quality care. "So we at U of T are keen on making sure that we have curriculum development that reflects that in all of our health professional programs," she says.

On June 29, Governing Council approved funding of \$104,272 from the provost's Academic Initiatives Fund to support a director and Office of Interprofessional Education. The primary purpose of the office – which reflects objectives identified in U of T's Stepping Up academic plan such as interdisciplinarity and improved student experience – will be to promote the development, implementation and ongoing evaluation of core IPE curriculum for students in dentistry, medical radiation sciences, medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, pharmacy, physical education and health, physical therapy, social work and speech-language pathology.

The office will also foster enhanced partnerships with the hospitals and community sites affiliated with U of T to create and sustain clinical teaching environments that enable all health professional students to become better skilled in patient-centred collaborative practice.

The secondary purpose of the IPE office will be to facilitate the exploration of trans-professional issues – those issues where each professional program operates separately out of necessity but can share learning opportunities.

Groundwork for the new IPE office came from the Council of Health Science and Social Work Deans at U of T. Under the auspices of the council – which includes the faculties of nursing, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, physical education and health and social work – a working group called the IPE curriculum committee has been examining interprofessional education for many years.

During her tenure as medicine's associate dean, graduate and inter-faculty affairs, Whiteside chaired that curriculum committee on behalf of the council. One of the highly successful programs supported by the council is the U of T Centre for the Study of Pain Interfaculty Education Initiative.

The initiative has been chaired for the past three years by physical therapy professor Judi Hunter who says its goal is to teach students how to collaborate and work with other health professionals to provide optimum patient-centred care. "We teach students how to identify a patient's goal, what the problems are interfering with those goals and who on the team can work together with the patient to help them best accomplish these goals," she says.

Adds Whiteside, "I think what we'll see will be a real focus on patient-centred care where professionals work in teams and the lead professional would be the most appropriate health professional to be taking leadership in the management of the care of the individual, and that's not necessarily the doctor or even the nurse. The focus would be to work together to ensure patient-centred care."

The Interfaculty Pain Curriculum is now a mandatory part of the curriculum for some 750 students from six health professions.

"Our program is helping the student to understand pain," says Hunter. "They learn about neurophysiology – the mechanisms of pain and what treatment is aimed at – but we also bring in patients and they talk to students and express their experiences with having their pain treated."

She adds that the program also includes a large interprofessional portion where students work together in small groups of eight on a patient case, led by expert clinician-facilitators.

Prior to IPE programs, students in health profession and social work faculties likely had more informal training during clinical placements. "But until you get it as an element in the curriculum, that's evaluated and seen as core curriculum, it's really not part and parcel of the depth of learning that we would like to see within our health professions," says Whiteside.

With the success of the Interfaculty Pain Curriculum, it could serve as a model for other IPE education initiatives, Hunter says. Whiteside adds that the director of the IPE office will report to the Council of Health Science and Social Work Deans to co-ordinate the effort over all the health professions.