

Inter-professional education in behavioral medicine: Training medical and clinical psychology students together in primary care for improved management of medically unexplained symptoms

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Background: About 15-30 % of all primary care consultations concern patients with medically unexplained symptoms. Interprofessional Education (IPE) strives to create a holistic health care by empowering professionals to cope with issues that surpass the scope of any one profession, via teamwork. An academic course brought medical and psychology students together in primary care, to learn behavioral medicine techniques as well as inter-professional collaboration.

Aims: This presentation describes the first and second courses given during the fall terms of 2006 and 2007.

Material and Methods: Students attended seminars on primary health care (PHC), psychiatric aspects of PHC, stress, depression, eating disorders, pain, motivational interviewing, gender issues, mindfulness, lifestyle changes, burnout, and sleep. The students met with one patient on three occasions under supervision by primary health care clinicians (physicians, psychologists, and psychotherapists). Examination consisted of collaborative papers, presentations to coursemates, and feedback to the primary care clinic. Results were measured by a course evaluation, questionnaires measuring changes in knowledge and attitudes about each others' professions, and qualitative analysis of project papers.

Results: Both groups of students appreciated the clinical practicum course considerably. Knowledge of what the other profession does increased significantly over time ($p < .05$), particularly for psychology students. Agreement with the statement that both physicians and psychologists are needed in primary care also increased significantly over time ($p < .05$), particularly for medical students.

Conclusions: A behavioral medicine platform adequately addresses the biopsychosocial problems presented by a large proportion of modern primary care patients. One effective way to establish such a platform is a collaborative course for medical and clinical psychology students in primary care. The patient's sense of ontological security may increase when met by medical and psychological expertise at the same time, creating an optimal setting for a secure therapeutic alliance and facilitating more effective health promotion.