

Medical and Health Students Promoting IPE Using Innovative Approaches

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Summary

Interprofessional education (IPE) is an essential pedagogical tool to advance health professionals' education towards providing patient care in a collaborative environment. With multiple evidence showcasing its necessity for health students, still, not many students learn about it in their university curriculum.

The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) organized with other international health student organizations an international campaign to educate students about IPE and assist them to act on IPE promotion locally. IFMSA also coordinated with International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation (IPSF) to host the first global IPE competition for health students with participation of 300 students from 66 countries. IFMSA is also having a survey on IPE education in universities worldwide, results will be used by students to advocate for IPE inclusion in the curriculum in the future.

The Interprofessional education (IPE) definition states that it “occurs when two or more professions (students, residents and health workers) learn with, about, and from each other to enable effective collaboration and improve health outcomes.”¹ Interprofessional teams enhance the quality of care for patients and their stay duration. It also lowers costs and reduces medical errors². IPE is supported by the World Health Organization (WHO), National academies of Practice, and many other organizations as a necessary approach for health students.

Nowadays, most of the health care students around the world do not get enough insight into IPE during their education. They also lack exposure to interact, learn, and collaborate with other health professions during their studies.

The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) represents 1,3 million medical students from 129 countries and works on uniting and building students' capacity to advocate on global and local health issues. IFMSA identified IPE as a focus area for this year for its importance in improving students' education as well as patient care. The lack of IPE application in universities throughout the world opens a space for students to step up and act on it.

IFMSA aims to educate health students worldwide and raise their awareness about IPE, to encourage and assist them to take action locally on it, and to provide a virtual space for students to experience working in an interprofessional environment. On a longer-term to identify different IPE successes, lacks, and challenges in universities and to assist students to advocate for IPE inclusion in their universities.

To achieve that, IFMSA started a global social media campaign in collaboration with other global health students' organizations namely IPSF, IADS, GASNN, and WCCS representing pharmacy, dentistry, nursing, and chiropractic students worldwide respectively. The organizations shared with health students in different countries interactive materials on IPE and interprofessional practice. This included videos, infographics, discussion questions, and a webinar. The number of interactions was assessed, and the campaign had more than 35,000 reaches from over 70 countries. Health students' organizations then launched the global survey to evaluate IPE education in different universities to get data that will help for IPE advocacy later on. 150 responses were received so far.

Finally, in collaboration with the International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation (IPSF), IFMSA organized the first global, interprofessional clinical skills competition named “Brainfuse Competition” between health students which was held completely online. The competition assembled health students into teams of five members, with each team including two or more health specialties. Participants received an introduction workshop about IPE and interprofessional team practice. They also received a guiding handbook and online materials for them to document better and be more able to work together in a multidisciplinary team. Participants then received a clinical case taken from virtual-ipe.com and had two weeks to work as an interprofessional team on the case analysis and decision making. Submissions were scored by judges from different advanced academic backgrounds, and 10 final teams did online presentations in front of a judging panel. Three best teams were then chosen.

More than 1,100 persons applied to participate. The competition had the participation of 300 students from 66 countries and from 16 health professions. Evaluation surveys showed an increase in the knowledge and interest of students on IPE.

What is unique about this initiative is that it is student-led. This is a major factor that guarantees more student involvement. Another factor was the international aspect of the work. This created a space for exchange and learning between students from different countries. It also introduced the organizers and students in general to different challenges being faced by other countries and what does or does not work in different contexts. Medical and health students are united today through different health student federations worldwide. These federations also work together to ensure sharing and unity between health students from different countries and with other health practices. This unity and network gave birth to this initiative on IPE and opens doors for students to be active advocates in their local contexts about IPE, improving patient care, and other health and education issues.

Another positive factor regarding the initiative is being sustainable. The education and awareness campaign was social media-based and the competition was supported by the AMBOSS education company which provided free educational materials for winners as prizes. This was the only potential expense. This ensures the sustainability of the initiative and the possibility of its reproduction in different contexts.

This experience was an initiation into health students acting on IPE. In the future, the next actions will follow to ensure scaling and the initiative having a greater impact. Starting with officially structuring the competition and repeating it on the global level by international health student organizations, as well as sharing instructions with students on how they can initiate similar competitions on the national level. This will play a major role in getting students familiar with interprofessional education and practice.

On the policy level, after analyzing the results of the survey regarding IPE education, an article is to be shared by IFMSA about the need to include IPE in health students' education. Another article is being prepared based on the evaluation of the competition to showcase its effect on health students and interprofessional education and practice. Those two papers will be used by health students in different countries to advocate for more IPE inclusion in their curriculum and the initiation of national interprofessional competitions. The final outcome is ensuring a more patient-centered care approach in the future and better work and interactions between medical and health teams.

Endnotes

1. Centre for the Advancement of Interprofessional Education in the United Kingdom and the World Health Organization
2. Institute of Medicine Committee on the Health Professions Education Summit. Health Professions Education: A Bridge to Quality. In: Greiner AC, Knebel E, editors. Washington, DC: National Academy Press; 2003