The purpose of this paper is to describe the learning activities of an interprofessional class attended by radiologic science and physical therapy students on improving patient safety through effective communication.

The development of communication skills is essential for effective interprofessional health care teams and the promotion of patient safety. A large percentage of sentinel adverse events in health care settings are the result of poor communication. Communication often breaks down when there is a “handoff”, for example, when care of a patient is transferred from one health professional to another. One method that is effective in avoiding miscommunications and errors is the SBAR tool (Situation-Background-Assessment-Recommendation). The SBAR tool is a framework that provides structure to communication between two or more people on the health care team.

Seventeen radiologic science students and 40 physical therapy students participated in an hour long session to pilot test this module. Faculty from the departments of Radiologic Sciences, Physical Therapy and Nursing led the sessions. A pre test and post test was administered. Learning activities included: (1) viewing an interprofessional video followed by a large group discussion (2) introduction of the handoff concept followed by the instructors’ personal stories about interprofessional interactions. (3) introduction and overview of the SBAR tool and (4) role playing a given case scenario using the SBAR tool.

There was a significant difference from pre-test to post-test on the questionnaire item about structured communication. Student feedback on the open-ended questions evidenced that they liked the video scenes, but that they rated the instructors’ personal stories regarding patient safety and the SBAR tool the highest.

This learning module could be adapted for any groups of health care students to introduce important concepts about communication and patient safety.