Readers Theater: Promoting Interprofessional Communication through Innovative Pedagogy

Saturday, March 13, 2010: 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. 105/107 Bluemle Life Sciences Building

Karen T. Pardue, University of New England, Maine

The ability of providers to work effectively in interprofessional teams is paramount in ensuring quality and safety in health care delivery. While the tenet of relationship-centered care emphasizes authentic connection between clinician and client, relationship-centered approaches must also be extended to include all of the members of the health care team. Creating educational environments that foster interprofessional appreciation and understanding among the different disciplines is a challenging academic endeavor. The literature instructs exposure and modeling of team functioning needs to occur before professional boundaries become firmly established. Ideally, principles of communication, conflict resolution, negotiation, and team functioning are afforded early on in the educational experience of beginning clinicians, and are coupled with the opportunity to practice and enact these newly acquired skill sets.

Readers Theater is a novel, affective pedagogical strategy that promotes interprofessional dialogue. Readers Theater involves a formal, scripted narrative that is dramatically read aloud. As a Readers Theater unfolds, participants become intertwined with the images, characters and backdrop presented in the story. Much like Radio Theater, the narrative arouses personal thoughts and feelings among participants as the presented issues and conflicts are contemplated. The affective nature of this teaching strategy calls forth individual imagination, intuition and creativity, and this thinking becomes united with empirically-based disciplinary knowledge. A Readers Theater experience concludes with an audience discussion of the story. This shared experience is a critical element for interprofessional education, as this creates a springboard for dialogue, identification of unique disciplinary perspectives, joint clinical problem solving, and teamwork.

In this workshop, participants will learn of the educational integration of Readers Theater into select coursework and college-wide events at the University of New England, Westbrook College of Health Professions (UNE/ WCHP). UNE/ WCHP offers undergraduate and graduate education to eight different health profession programs, with a dedicated collegiate commitment to promoting interprofessional learning opportunities. The history and method of Readers Theater will be explicated. An actual reading will be demonstrated, followed by a facilitated group discussion modeling approaches to interprofessional education. Attendees of this workshop will experience first-hand the power of this affective teaching strategy and will learn methods for successfully incorporating this technique into interprofessional venues. Insights and lessons learned from three years of Readers Theater experiences at UNE/ WCHP will be shared. Student reflections and evaluation of learning from this innovative strategy will be offered. Affective pedagogical approaches have implications for interprofessional education as they support the development of clinicians with capacity for skillful communication, effective conflict resolution, and contribution to optimal team functioning.