



A picture tells 1000 words: learning teamwork in primary care

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SUMMARY

Background: Teamwork and patient centredness are frequently articulated concepts in medical education, but are not always explicit in the curriculum. In Ireland, recent government policy emphasises the importance of a primary care team approach to health care. We report on an appraisal of a newly introduced community-based student attachment, which focused on teamwork.

Aim: To review students' experience of teamwork following a community clinical placement by examining student assignments: essays, poetry, music and art.

Methods: Year-2 graduate-entry students ($n = 45$) spent 2 weeks with a primary care team. Attachments comprised placements with members of the primary care team, emphasising team dynamics, at the end of which students submitted a representative piece of work, which captured their learning. Essays ($n = 22$) were analysed using a thematic content analysis. Artwork consisted of painting, collage, photography, poetry and original music ($n = 23$). These were analysed using Gardner's entry points.

Results: Three core themes emerged in both written and visual

work: patient centredness; communication; and an improved appreciation of the skills of other health care professionals. Students identified optimal team communication occurring when patient outcomes were prioritised. Metaphors relating to puzzles, hands and inter-connectedness feature strongly. The poems and artwork had a high impact when they were presented to tutors.

Conclusion: Primary care team placements focus student attention on teamwork and patient centredness. Student artwork shows potential as a tool to evaluate student learning in medical education.

Primary care team placements focus student attention on teamwork

The need to ensure medical graduates develop teamworking skills is well established.

INTRODUCTION

The need to ensure medical graduates develop teamworking skills is well established.^{1,2} Increasing evidence shows that interprofessional learning improves patient outcomes.³ Primary health care placements are environments where good models of patient centredness, and multi- and interprofessional collaboration, exist.^{4,5} Consensus has yet to emerge in relation to the assessment of learning achieved in such interprofessional encounters.^{6,7} The authors were drawn to the emerging evidence base on the impact of the arts and humanities in medical education.^{8–10} We wondered whether offering our students the opportunity to document their learning in an innovative way would harness the benefits of arts-based interventions, whilst also providing us with an insight into student learning.¹¹ In the context of a graduate programme, we also wished to give students with non-science backgrounds an opportunity to submit work that might reflect their previous learning.

In Ireland, the government policy *Primary Care – A New Direction* promotes the establishment of primary care teams and networks to deliver ‘an integrated, inter-disciplinary, high-quality, team-based and user-friendly set of services’.¹² Members of the

primary care team include general practitioner (GPs), nurses, midwives, health care assistants, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers and administrative personnel. A wider primary care network of other primary care professionals, such as speech and language therapists, community pharmacists, dieticians, community welfare officers, dentists, chiropractors and psychologists, also provide services for the enrolled population of each primary care team. These newly formed teams offer a unique opportunity for medical students to take part in team-based clinical placements.

METHODS

The placement

As part of a new graduate-entry programme, we introduced a 2-week primary care team placement to year 2, graduate-entry students ($n = 45$). The objective of the placement was: (1) to increase students’ knowledge of the various health care professionals working in primary care; and (2) to develop their awareness and understanding of professional teamwork.

The placement consisted of a mix of presentations and day placements, with various team members of the primary care team. Large group sessions were given by a dietician, social worker, pharmacist, psychologist,

The winds of change are blowing
The focus is transforming
The ‘One’ who once had to seek help
Is now sought after
The centre of attention, the reason for the Team

The Team, though individuals, are one
United in mission and purpose
Learning, adapting and growing
Building lasting relationships
Doing what is best for their ‘One’

They keep the hospital at bay
Reserving it for a time when truly needed
While keeping their ‘One’
In the best place anyone could ever be
Home, sweet home – close to family and friends

They are none other than the Primary Care Team!
Functioning despite the odds
And facing challenges together
Continually striving for excellence
And turning the healthcare ideal into reality

Figure 1. The Dream Team by Josephine Yeboah-Henaku

nurse managers and addiction counsellor. Students visited a sexual health clinic, homeless service, local voluntary groups and nursing homes. Student placements, of 2 weeks in duration, included sessions with GPs, public health nurses, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, social workers and paramedics, with the opportunity of seeing patients interact with a range of professionals.

This placement occurs after another 3-week junior clinical attachment to general practice, which differs in its learning objectives.

Evaluation

At the end of the attachment students were asked to submit a

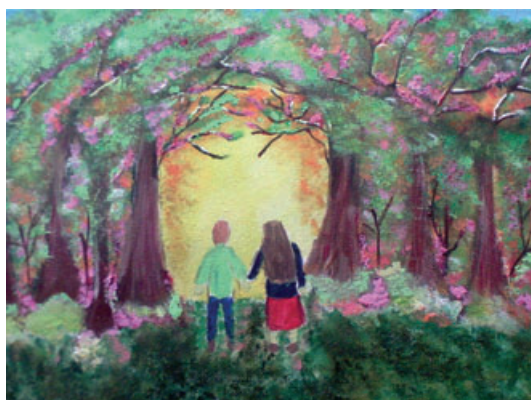


Figure 2. Painting ‘Into the Light’ and accompanying text by Eddie Horgan

The 8 trees represent the 8 health care professionals I met on my rotation.

The branches of the tree intertwine to form a canopy and provide shelter for the subject, just like the various healthcare professionals interweave to provide care for the patient.

Although the patient may be in a dark place at the moment, he is not alone and there is light at the end of the tunnel. The subject is not alone as he has a primary care team member to walk with him.

case report, in which they critically evaluated the role of team-based care. They were given the option of doing this in a traditional essay format or as artwork. (Figures 1–5)

Essays ($n = 22$) were analysed using a thematic content analysis.¹³ Artwork consisted of painting, collage, photography, poetry and original music ($n = 23$), which were analysed using Gardner's entry points.¹⁴

Both M.K. and S.O.F. independently analysed a sample of student work, and met to discuss the emergent themes and to check the consistency of terminology used for coding. Following analysis of the entire data set, all four authors met to discuss findings, resolve disputes and agree on the categorisation of themes.

Data analysis did not start until students had progressed to the next academic year, where none of the authors play a role in student assessment.

Students were made aware from the outset that, as a new module, the module would be evaluated as part of ongoing curricular development. Consent was sought from students to analyse their work, following completion of the academic year. Ethical approval was granted by the Cork Regional Ethics committee.

A summary of the research findings was posted on the virtual learning environment. Students whose work was chosen to be presented to the primary care team were sent a preliminary draft of the analysis to ensure that our findings were consistent with their experience, and that our interpretation of their work was true. Students gave their permission to include their work for publication, as acknowledged, and were also asked to comment on the original draft of this article.

RESULTS

Three key themes emerged from our analysis of student work: patient-centred care; communication; and respect and appreciation of the skills of other professionals.

Patient-centred care

Students appreciated that health care professionals working together effectively have a profound impact on a patient's health care experiences. The most dominant theme was the primacy of the patient. Experiencing the interaction of health care professionals working together refocused care on the patient and his or her wishes.

One of the most important points that I encountered during this attachment was that the patient must also be seen as part of the team,

with open communication and planning that suits the needs and desires of the patient whenever possible. **Student 10, female**

I found my experience with a primary care team enlightening. Seeing a successful team proved to me that this model of care can work...by discussing a patient as part of a team, optimum care can be organised....the patient-centred focus filters through the team to create a cohesive unit for the benefit of their patients. **Student 31, female**

Communication

The importance of good communication between team members was emphasised.

The primary care team can work together to provide patients with excellent care, but is dependant on ongoing communication between the team members as well as a clear understanding of what the other team members do. **Student 17, female**

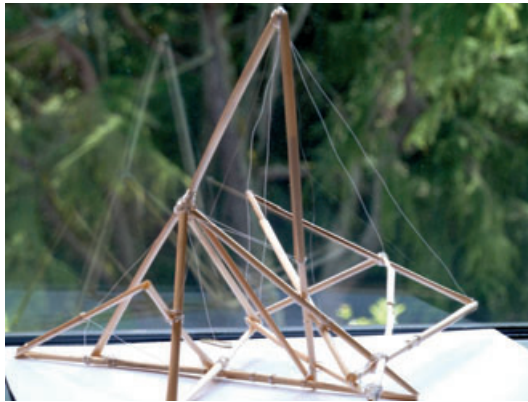
Students reflected on past experiences and recalled

[Students]were given the option of [evaluating team-based care] in a traditional essay format or as artwork



It is only when all the pieces come together that you can see that they really are greater than the sum of their parts

Figure 3. Painting 'The Sum of the Parts' and accompanying text by Coman Hennelly



Created with straw and silver wire, this structure represents the fragile yet flexible nature of the primary care team. No glue was used and the structure is held together by the wire, representing the relationships of various members of the team. The shadow cast by the light as it shines through the structure at different times of the day highlights the shifting nature of care, according to the patients needs.

Figure 4. Sculpture 'The Straw House' and accompanying text by Dilys Chen

occasions where they considered better interprofessional communication could have improved patient care.

From my experience of talking to individuals in the health care system, many of these services are available in each community. The problem is that communication between the individual service providers in the community is poor, and the understanding of the role each individual agent plays in the community is also poorly appreciated. **Student 25, male**

Students identified the importance of team meetings in improving communication.

I felt his care could be improved if a formal structure were introduced to the manner in which this communication took place, with regular meetings where cases could be discussed, as opposed to telephone calls being made between health care professionals when a patient's situation was beginning to worsen. **Student 42, male**

Students considered the need for better communication between primary and secondary care.

Communication between primary and secondary care is often inadequate, and patients may be discharged home without the primary care team's knowledge. Liaisons between both parties need to be improved. **Student 16, female**

Appreciation of other skills

A key outcome of the attachment is that students were offered an opportunity to learn how different team members work, and to appreciate the synergistic effect of multi-disciplinary care on patient health.

During this past year, I have seen many doctors refer patients to such professionals, but I had never really understood their actual roles in patient care. Now, I feel that I have a much better understanding of how each discipline contributes to a patient's well-being. **Student 14, female**

Students admitted that the 'team' comprised many people they would not have thought to play a role in health care: e.g. the police, paramedics and care

assistants. Students considered how their attitudes had changed as a result of the attachment.

I had misplaced conceptions of the roles that professionals carried out within the community, and I now acknowledge that unknowingly I had developed inaccurate 'stereotypes', which I felt represented their occupation. **Student 29, male**

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

We describe an innovative placement with a primary care team for graduate medical students, which focused on teamwork. Students demonstrate an awareness of the importance of teamwork and an insight into the contribution of different health care professionals to patient care. Students recognise that good communication processes are fundamental to the success of teamwork, and cite both positive and negative examples of this, based on their clinical exposure.

The alternative assignment offered to students had a high uptake. Metaphors relating to interconnectedness and the importance of teamwork in promoting patient centeredness feature strongly. These images and



The centre of the picture is the community, emphasising the importance of patient-centred care. The hands are united in a circle and facing towards the community exhibiting the healthcare support which the primary care teams provides. It also symbolises the unity and teamwork which should exist between different healthcare professionals. Overlapping fingers represent professional collaboration, teamwork and communication which strengthen the team.

This provide a valued opportunity for self-expression and the focusing on an individual

Figure 5. Painting 'Helping Hands and accompanying text by Niamh Scanlon

poetry had a high impact on other tutors, general practice teachers and students when displayed in a local exhibition, with the student's permission. This student work could be used in faculty development, recruitment of new primary care teams and as teaching material. A theme from the student responses is that this provide a valued opportunity for self-expression and the focusing on an individual as a person.¹⁵

A potential limitation to this study is our small sample size and that we did not collect any baseline data on students' experience of, or attitudes to, working with interprofessional teams. However, from the qualitative comments it would seem that students valued this opportunity. We conclude that this model could be adopted by other primary care teams and that our approach to its evaluation may add to the debate regarding the role of arts in medical education.

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