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The Rich Environments for Active Learning (REAL) Project: Using technology to create a learning experience that simulates collaborative healthcare practice.

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Introduction

Ontario institutions who teach health professionals are promoting Interprofessional Education (IPE) and collaborative practice. The 'Rich Environments for Learning' (REAL) project is designed to use technology to create opportunities for a virtual learning experience which simulates Interprofessional practice and facilitates the development of core Interprofessional competencies in pre-licensure health professional students.

Objectives

To design, develop, implement and assess a technology-facilitated learning experience that: simulates Interprofessional practice settings; are accessible and adaptable to a variety of contexts and settings; and prepares health science students for actual practice.

Methods

Eight on-line case modules were developed that covered both interprofessional and occupational therapy specific content. Each module contained an authentic case study reflective of practice in Ontario including rural and regional health centre scenarios and related learning activities.

Prelicensure students (N=350) from health disciplines (Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Nursing, Medicine) worked in various ways to explore cases, develop common resources and complete related tasks using the interactive web-based modules. These modules were designed to provide multi layered levels of learning to enable students learn discipline-specific content up to IP competencies

The study design used the 'Educational Management Action Research' (EMAR) model to evaluate the implementation of on-line learning environments. Focus groups and questionnaires will be administered throughout the implementation of the REAL project.

Results

The project is currently underway, with results by March 2010. It is anticipated that occupational therapy students will demonstrate increased IP competence and engagement with other health disciplines through a virtual learning environment.

Conclusion

Virtual learning modules designed for IP/IPE provide opportunities for content delivery, communication and collaboration across diverse contexts and curricular models in the health sciences.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy.

The REAL project provides a novel example of embedding IPE and IP competencies within existing OT programs. It is a useful example of e-learning which could be expanded and shared amongst OT programs worldwide. This web module could be accessible under 'Creative Commons Licence' to other educational groups and the 'open source' code allows potential for this infrastructure to be

adapted to other educational settings in partnership with Queen's the School of Medicine's MedTech Unit.