

# Physical Therapist Students' Perceptions of Learning from a Year-Long, Community-Based, Client-Focused, Interprofessional Education Experience Involving Nine Disciplines

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**Introduction.** This study examined physical therapist students' perceptions of their learning from a year-long, community-based, client-focused, interprofessional education experience (IPE) involving nine disciplines.

**Method.** Sixty-nine Doctor of Physical Therapy students ( $n = 69$ ) completed a reflection paper at the end of an IPE, consisting of small group visits of students from four of the nine different health care disciplines, with families in their homes, larger structured group discussions with faculty, and a wellness project. The students participated in four home visits, and six discussion sessions were completed

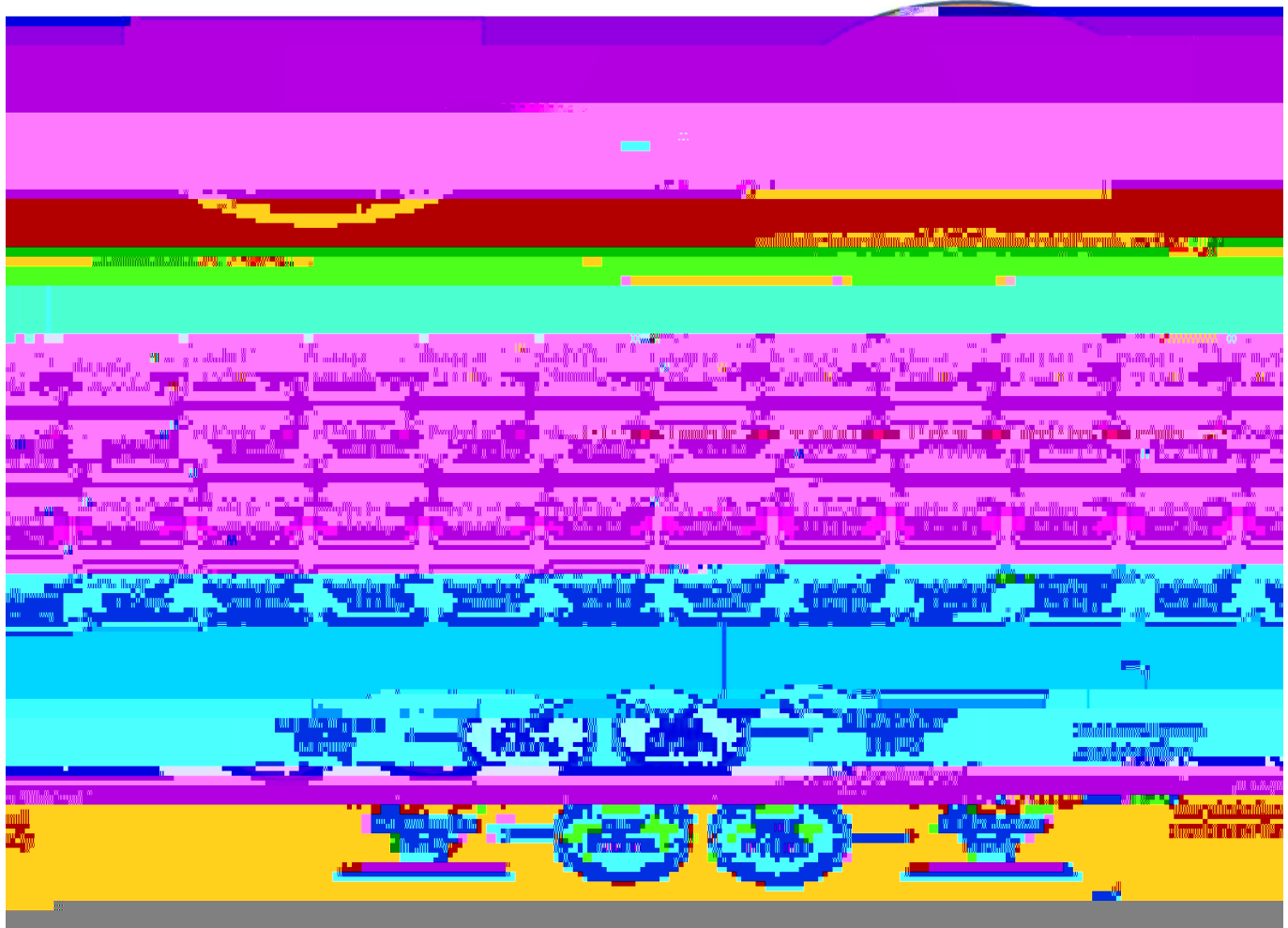
...s goals can be different from the students' expectations.

**Discussion and Conclusion.** This IPE was perceived as an effective and meaningful instructional strategy. The realistic situated learning methods resulted in students appreciating the need for individualized consideration of the patient as a whole person. The extended period of team-based requirements fostered a deeper understanding of communication across professions and with

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## INTRODUCTION

The Institute of Medicine<sup>1</sup> and the World Health Organization<sup>2</sup> have suggested that interprofessional education experience (IPE) is essential to prepare new health care professionals for the demands of health care delivery in the 21st century. Interprofessional learning environments prepare individuals to work across disciplines in team-based settings to serve the increasingly complex needs of patients. Th



learning processes embedded in the context of real problems and with patients.<sup>9</sup> Although the recent accreditation requirements and APTA endorsement for IPE initiatives have resulted in an increased focus on IPE activities,<sup>6,10</sup> classroom activities are often the instructional method of choice because of logistics and the time involved for community or clinical experiences.<sup>10</sup> There are a wide array of models, however, most involve limited student engagement in finite, short periods of time, which occur in structured laboratory or didactic settings, not authentic, contextual environments.<sup>11</sup> Models that enable a continuum of community experience with the same individuals and teams are not as common.

Most reported outcomes from IPE use survey instruments that reflect changes in attitudes and knowledge. Several authors have reported changes in knowledge and attitudes toward other health professions based on students' participation in IPE using a variety of survey instruments such as the Interdisciplinary Education Preparation Scale

(IEPS), the Readiness for Professional Learning Scale (RIPLS), and the Attitudes Toward Health Care Teams Scale (ATHCTS).<sup>11-13</sup> Although these studies have examined changes in students' knowledge and attitudes using these closed ended measures after IPE, the surveys have some limitations and there may be benefit from using qualitative methods to expand on the impact of these immersive learning opportunities from the students' perspective.

Our university takes a unique and comprehensive contextual learning approach to interprofessional education. Students visit volunteer families in their communities over two semesters, with structured objectives and projects to guide learning related to working with other professions and social determinants of health. Figure 1 illustrates the Interdisciplinary Family Health Program (IFH) as it was structured during the academic year this study occurred. Interdisciplinary Family Health Program was established as an interprofessional service-learning program in

1999.<sup>14</sup> At present, over 1000 first-year health professions students (clinical health psychology, dentistry, health administration, medicine, nursing, nutrition, pharmacy, PT, and veterinary medicine) participate in this program required by all of the colleges that comprise our academic health center. Interprofessional teams of four are assigned to a volunteer family in the local community. Students visit families in their homes four times during the academic year. During the home visits, students complete health-related questionnaires with the patient. They also complete a project aimed to address the patient's health needs. Students also participate in six faculty-facilitated interprofessional small group sessions. Each session has a theme that provides students with introductory content related to teamwork, roles and responsibilities, patient safety, social determinants of health, and health disparities. During the sessions, students debrief about their home visits and discuss their project work, with the final session culminating in



Another student described how the differences in background and education illustrated the strengths of other health professions and areas in which the other professions contribute to the overall care of patients:

D g g ee g a d w e  
g I ea ed e ab  
w a eac fe ac a d e, e  
e e e e f, a ga dw, e  
d, a d e c -  
c ce f e e de  
g Th wa a abe be abe  
e w a e, ea, e w a  
eac fe d e a d de a d  
e, d f a e w e ea g f  
a e w a wa d e d, g e,  
e e e ce w e e, fe a.

Not only did students gain a better understanding of the training and education other health professionals receive, but also how their thought processes vary from their own field and how this awareness expanded their perspectives. One student stated:

The g fica g Iga edf  
e e e ce wa ea g w  
dffe e ea fe e be  
. O fi, we a ed-  
a e ed e d, ec e -  
a g, fie d f d. I w d  
e ec a b a e a e e a  
a f e g a  
a ca be e a a ed a e  
fe A a ca ea, I  
eed a ab ed ca e e  
g I'

by studying the impact of an extensive and immersive situated learning experience. In addition, findings from such an experience from the students', particularly PT students, perspective have not been previously de-

needs of patients within their individual environments and develop a culture of interprofessional teamwork early within the professional curriculum. Exposing students to a community of practice is hoped to set the stage for a broader understanding of the value

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