The Use of Multidisciplinary Pediatric Health Screenings in Developing Interprofessional Relationships Among Healthcare Students

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ABSTRACT

The University of Alabama Schools of Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, Optometry and Health Related Professions have partnered with non-profit Sight Saver’s of America Kid Check to conduct multi-disciplinary health screening for area school children. This project, called Smile Alabama, was piloted in 2011 and expanded to a monthly event through the 2012-13 academic year. While the screenings provide a valuable health service for the children, the DentaQuest Foundation funded this project because of the interdisciplinary educational component of how the screenings are conducted. At the screenings, teams are formed with students from each of the UAB healthcare schools and these teams work together to conduct physical, vision and dental assessments of each child. When the first physical exams are performed, the nursing and medical students teach the dental and optometry students how to conduct the exam and what to look for and when vision and dental exams are performed, the dental and optometry students are able to demonstrate key things they are looking for. As more children are screened, students are challenged to switch roles, allowing the dental student to conduct physical exams as directed by a medical student, nursing students to conduct dental exams as directed by a dental student, etc. The students from each discipline gain valuable experience in screening for problems outside of their area of expertise and, at the same time, develop interprofessional communication skills. Student feedback has been especially positive about the interprofessional interactions in this project, indicating they value the opportunity to develop relationships with their healthcare colleagues while in training. Additionally, Sight Saver’s of America Kid Check works with area schools to set-up the screenings, provides the software program for recording findings and coordinates follow-up care for children with identified needs. This represents a partnering of public education and non-profit organizations where strengths from both groups combine to achieve a more thorough health screening and educational experience. Children benefit from detailed health screenings that are completed in one setting, professional students benefit from multidisciplinary experiences and relationship building, the healthcare schools benefit by achieving interdisciplinary curriculum objectives while costs are spread among multiple schools, and the non-profits benefit by having an inexpensive workforce that helps them fulfill their mission. The Smile Alabama project has demonstrated that multiple healthcare schools, when given a defined task such as health screenings, can successfully work together with outside non-profits to achieve excellence beyond their individual capabilities.

INTRODUCTION

In 2011 UAB Schools of Medicine, Dentistry and Nursing recognized a need for a multidisciplinary curriculum focused on oral health. DentaQuest foundation was identified as potential funding partner for project. A grant was submitted and accepted:

• 2011-2012 DentaQuest funds pilot project bringing together UAB Schools of Nursing, Dentistry, Medicine to provide health screenings for children.
• 2012-2013 DentaQuest funds implementation and expansion of project to include UAB Optometry and Physician Assistants.

METHODS

The KidCheckPlus identifies grade schools and daycares that need health screenings. Students asked to review Smiles for Life Oral Health Curriculum online before screenings. Teams are formed with students and faculty from:

• Child receives health screening with representatives from each discipline teaching the other disciplines what they do.

Student Responses

What was the most helpful or beneficial aspect of the project to you?

• Communicating with other docs
• Great to interact with others
• It was a good experience to learn how to work together as a health care team.
• The teamwork was most beneficial with this service.
• I liked interacting with students in other professional schools. I also liked working with the kids; they were so fun!
• To be able to work alongside another professional in their own discipline.
• Really enjoyed collaborating with students from other professional schools.
• Observing what other disciplines look at during their initial exam.
• I liked seeing how other people performed assessments.
• Good inter-disciplinary experience.

What did you learn by participating?

• I learned how to do a thorough oral exam and what exactly to look for in terms of tooth health. I was also able to practice my skills in performing PA’s which is always a good thing.
• I learned what to look for on a basic eye and ear exam along with a general overall physical.
• How much you can learn from students from other schools.
• Importance of inter-professional training.
• I learned about how to identify cavities.

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