AN INTERPROFESSIONAL APPROACH TO INTERNATIONAL MISSION TRIPS

Objectives
- Describe the process of developing and organizing a university-sponsored medical mission trip.
- Outline the goals of the medical mission trip for the program, students, and patients.
- Delineate the roles of the different program faculty and students.
- Discuss the effectiveness of the interprofessional approach in the clinic setting.
- Identify the common challenges encountered in international medical mission trips.

Trip Development
- The birth of an idea
  - In 2005, campus chaplain communicated a desire for a health professions mission trip.
  - Chaplain had a contact with El Ayudante, a missions agency in Nicaragua.
Trip Development

- Initial goals
  - Students evaluate patients with faculty oversight
  - Include pharmacy students and faculty

- Planning Process
  - Recruited PA and pharmacy students, faculty and community physicians
  - Consulted with NGO regarding the common types of health problems and the medications needed

Trip Development

- Lessons learned
  - Need 9 months of planning
  - Need for leadership team
  - Fundraising challenges
  - Specify medicine and supply donations

  Given the opportunity, students rise every time!

Trip Organization

- Pre-trip
  - Meetings
    - Information session
    - Distribute applications & covenants
  - Team
    - Lessons on Nicaraguan culture & language
    - Medical training
    - Team building
  - Medications and Supplies
    - Inventory donations and make purchases
    - Packing day
Trip Organization

Execution
- Divided into 3 teams of 16 or 17
  - 8 PA students; 2 pharmacy students; 2 PT students
  - 1 PA, 1 Pharmacy and 1 PT faculty member
  - 1 physician and 1 pastor
- Transported medications and supplies via individual suitcases
- El Ayudante planned the schedule and provided food, lodging, interpreters and ground transport

Lessons learned
- Students do not like paperwork
- Collect money before committing to airline tickets
- Collaboration among students benefits all experience levels
- Organize every detail but be flexible
- Cooperation with Ministry of Health requirements aids with Customs clearance
Overarching Goals

- Provide quality health care and patient education
- Provide personal and professional growth
- Utilize faculty role-modeling
- Foster interprofessional approach
- Enhance cultural competence
- Promote sustainable change through preventative health education

Overarching Goals

- Maintain collegial relationship with El Ayudante
- Enhance the standing of El Ayudante with the community
- Support El Ayudante's bridge with Nicaraguan Ministry of Health

Goals for Students

- Inspire life-long service to underserved populations
- Exposure to epidemiologic variations in low resource settings
- Provide quality healthcare to patients with limited access
- Benefit from faculty role-modeling
- Increase their understanding of the role of other health care disciplines in the health care team
- Increase confidence in their knowledge base and clinical skills
- Build lasting relationships with peers and future colleagues
Goals for Patients

- Be received with dignity and compassion
- Receive accessible health care at no cost
- Receive education on preventative measures to improve health
- To have positive interaction with health care providers

Roles of Program Faculty & Students

- Shenandoah University is United Methodist Affiliated
- Affiliation with El Ayudante
- One spiritual life leader for the trip
- Universal inclusion
- Pre-trip planning
  - Ice breakers, thought provoking questions
- During trip
  - Facilitate reflections, personal development and processing
  - Devotions

Spiritual Life
Faculty

- Pre-trip planning
  - Fundraising Events
  - Educate participants during pre-trip meetings
  - Packing Day

PA Program Faculty

- One PA faculty member per team
- Pre-trip planning
  - Overall organization and supply order, coordination with NGO
- During trip
  - Team leadership
  - Clinic logistics
  - Coordinate with the interpreters, pharmacist
  - Supervise/precept the PA Students
  - Facilitate debriefing sessions

Pharmacy Faculty

- One pharmacy faculty member per team
- Pre-trip planning
  - Oversee packing day, medication order, formulary
- During trip
  - Supervise pharmacy and pharmacy students
  - Monitor medication needs between teams
  - Purchase medications in country
  - Coordinate treatment plans
**Physical Therapy Faculty**

- One PT faculty member for trip
- Pre-trip planning
  - Application Process, order PT supplies
- During trip
  - Supervise/precept PT students
  - Coordinate with NGO for clinic locations
  - Provide training for local healthcare personnel
  - Facilitate debriefing sessions
  - Coordinate treatment plans

**Students**

- Prior to Trip
  - Raise funds, packing day, pre-trip meetings
- During the trip
  - Provide patient care
  - Support peers
  - Participate actively in all activities

**Students**

- Physician Assistant
  - 3 Pairs of 1st and 2nd year
  - Triage & direct patient care
- Pharmacy
  - 2-3 students per team
  - Dispense medication & therapy education
- Physical Therapy
  - 6 students per trip
  - Provide therapy in hospitals, schools for children with special needs, and medical teams
  - Provide education for local healthcare personnel
Interprofessional Education

- Collaborative approach to health care practice will improve health care delivery
- One way to accomplish this:
  - Integrate additional interprofessional training opportunities in education for health professionals
    - Institute of Medicine, 1988
    - Shugars et al., 1991
    - Council on Graduate Medical Education, 1994
    - American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 1995

Goals of Interprofessional Education

- Simulate and facilitate interprofessional practice
- Promote awareness/understanding of other health professions:
  - Roles and responsibilities
  - Scopes of practice
  - Educational preparation
- Promote appropriate professional interactions
- Expand critical thinking skills/abilities
Challenges Associated with Interprofessional Education

- Difficult to coordinate courses/schedules across programs
- Multidisciplinary ≠ Interprofessional
- Difficult to simulate clinical environment in the classroom

Successful Models of Interprofessional Education

- Courses
  - Patient-Centered Cases
    - Western University of the Health Sciences, Pomona, CA
    - Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science, Chicago, IL
  - Basic Science and Research courses
- Interdisciplinary Patient Care Experiences
  - Community Health Centers/Free Clinics
  - Mission Trips

Shenandoah University’s Interprofessional Mission Trip Experience

- Students/professionals:
  - observed other disciplines providing patient management
  - performed patient examinations collaboratively
  - communicated regarding most appropriate interventions for specific patients
  - shared cases during debriefing sessions
  - socialized during travel, meals, accommodations, cultural activities, etc.
Interprofessional Education Outcomes

- Participants had an improved awareness of respect for the unique skills and scope of practice of each discipline.
  - “I really understand what it is that a PT has to offer”
  - “I was so thankful to have the pharmacists there to check my dosing. I was really impressed with how they made drug substitutions based on availability and even compounded right there in the middle of nowhere.”

- Participants had increased comfort level with interprofessional communication.
  - “Traveling to Nicaragua with multiple disciplines made me realize how important it is to work together to fulfill the patients’ needs. As we worked side by side with the PA students, it made it easier to refer patients as well as discuss possible diagnoses in order to quickly develop a plan of care. The PA and pharmacy students took the time to teach me about examinations and how to decide on the different forms of medication appropriate for each patient.”

- Participants were more likely to make appropriate referrals.
  - “I was challenged with opportunities to intervene with physical therapy that I would never have thought of if I had not been working side by side with my peers in that specialty.”
  - “I am very thankful to have had the opportunity to work so closely with PT students and pharmacy students, and I hope that I am more aware of when a referral would be appropriate.”
Interprofessional Education Outcomes

- Patients received more comprehensive care
- “My experience with the PT and pharmacy students in Nicaragua allowed me to observe first hand how integrated our approach can be when choosing treatment options for patients. As a second year PA student, I had focused on more medical care up until that point. I felt that we were able to give more complete care to the people of Nicaragua, whereas years before, all we could offer for back pain or other orthopedic injuries was NSAIDs and counseling.”

COMMON CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN SHORT-TERM INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL MISSIONS

Common Overall Challenges

- Cost
- Time
- Logistics
**Student Challenges**

- Financing
- Accepting health risk
- Managing stress
- Accepting limitations
- Utilizing appropriate skill set, experience, responsibility
- Overcoming language and cultural barriers

**Sending Institution Challenges**

- Accepting direct and indirect costs
- Ensuring improved care for host community
- Maintaining moral obligation and ensuring “First Do No Harm”

**Host Challenges**

- Addressing gaps in local healthcare
- Maintaining standards of care in community
- Understanding limitations of acute focus
- Understanding the training level and experience of providers
- Coordinating logistics
- Facilitating orientation of participants
- Explaining mutual expectations
- Providing chronic disease management and follow up care
Guiding Principles

- Ensure health disparities are not exacerbated or exploited

- “Patients must always be treated as ends in themselves, not means to another end”

- Maintain goal of truly benefiting host and evaluate whether that is being achieved

Guiding Principles

- Promote partnering with community rather than medical tourism

- Work with existing medical and public health infrastructure

- Develop long-term partnerships with locals who want to help and need external help to function

- Find “local champion”

Guiding Principles

- Encourage mutual and reciprocal benefits

- Promote stability: faculty, host, location

- Reevaluate frequently: Are goals still being reached and how?
Conclusion

Using guiding principles and defined goals helps overcome the challenges and involved process of developing a successful medical mission trip. An interprofessional team approach provides better patient care within the limited scope. The end result is a mutually beneficial experience to patients and participants.

References

References

