

SOME CHALLENGES WE FACE IN HEALTH CARE are so complex and difficult that individuals working alone cannot solve them. Creating solutions requires a team-based approach with interprofessional perspectives and skill sets that only different disciplines working together can contribute. The future of health

care is changing because interprofessional education, practice and research are becoming an expectation for quality.

“It used to be the physician was the captain of the ship, and the ship had many other people on it working to keep everything afloat,” said Dean Marion E. Broome, PhD, RN, FAAN and Ruby Wilson Professor of Nursing at Duke University School of Nursing (DUSON). “But now we know that it takes many professions — public health, social work, medicine, nursing, pharmacy, physical therapy, physician assistant, occupational therapy — working together. Our patients are not just acutely ill, but oftentimes present a complex set of health challenges that require a complex solution. Interprofessional teams can deliver that solution.”

The movement toward interprofessionalism in health care has been happening for at least the last decade, Broome said, and Duke Health has placed it on the forefront of its strategic planning since 2015. Collaboration and partnership among the health profession schools and programs at Duke led to the creation of the Duke Health Center for Interprofessional Education and Care (IPEC), which brings together Duke’s four main health profession programs under one roof. (See IPEC on page 8).

Allowing students to see and experience other professional caregiver perspectives can generate new ideas and discoveries and deepen the students’ understanding of patient care, ultimately leading to

Using Partnerships





*to Drive Discovery
and Knowledge for Care*





Students from DUSON and the School of Medicine work together with faculty from both schools in an Interprofessional Clinic within Duke Hospital.



better outcomes, Broome said. “You can’t work as a team after graduation if you haven’t learned how to appreciate the disciplinary competencies of the other members of the team while you are in your educational program.”

A Center for Interprofessional Education

The new Duke IPEC Center, located adjacent to DUSON, will facilitate this team building not just by providing a physical space for students to interact, but also by creating programs and opportunities for collaboration. In addition to nursing students, students from the School of Medicine’s Departments of Physical Therapy, Physician Assistant and graduate medical education (MD) use the IPEC Center. Professor of Medicine Mitchell T. Heflin, MD, MHS, directs the center, supported by an assistant director from each of the four professional programs. Plans to include Duke’s Occupational Therapy program in the IPEC are in development.

Students from different educational disciplines learning together is beneficial on many levels, starting with mutual understanding. “Health professionals often

have only a cursory understanding of what their colleagues in other professions have learned to do,” Broome said. “But interacting together as early as possible, whether in classrooms, simulation labs or clinical settings, will shine a light on those gaps in understanding, and the IPEC Center will facilitate those interactions, eventually making them instinctive.”

“They will get to know each other enough to understand what each brings to the table, and which part of the proverbial elephant they focus on,” Broome said, explaining that traditionally each profession is trained to focus on different aspects of a patient or problem. “No one person sees the whole situation.” Complex problems have more than one answer, she added, and having as many different professional perspectives on a problem as possible often produces robust, dynamic and varied solutions.

“There’s no better part of your day than when you get synergy around a complex problem and you’re with people who are committed to solving that problem. Everyone discusses their ideas and then you come to a solution. It doesn’t get much better than that. Whatever you had

to offer was a piece of a very important puzzle,” Broome said.

The goal of the IPEC Center is to facilitate an educational experience that “occurs when students from two or more professions learn about, from and with each other” (World Health Organization, 2010). “Allowing our health care providers to practice as a team in a safe environment, such as a simulation lab, translates to better outcomes for our patients in the clinical setting,” said **Valerie Howard, EdD, MSN, RN, ANEF, CNE, FAAN** and associate dean of Academic Affairs at DUSON. “We know that health care is a team sport,” said Howard, who helped select the team of IPEC directors. In addition to practicing technical skills in the simulation lab, the IPEC Center will provide opportunities for students from different professions to practice “soft skills,” such as closed-loop communications and hand-off reports in the simulation lab and clinical setting.

Howard believes that creating multiple avenues for interprofessional partnerships will help generate more knowledge about health care in general, and help individual students grow their own understanding of patient care. “Traditionally, nursing faculty have taught their students about the services that other professionals provide in the classroom setting,” Howard noted.

Students from the School of Medicine and DUSON learn through simulations how to better understand each other’s roles to improve patient care.



“Think how much more effective it would be, however, to have an actual physical therapist teach nursing students what they do, or a physician’s assistant, social worker, or physician? It’s this experiential learning that really immerses our students with other healthcare professionals into these situations as a team,” Howard said. “It’s not just telling them. It’s allowing them to learn from and with each other in the sim lab, in the IPE suite or a clinical setting.”

Howard envisions many opportunities to craft curriculum and programs around the new IPEC. “This center will allow our health professions educators to sit together and begin planning together, coordinating together, designing learning outcomes for students and then measuring those outcomes. So [it will be] a fully integrated and collaborative effort from start to finish.”

By bringing together scholars from different professions, the IPEC Center will also generate new research opportunities, Howard said. “We’ll be able to contribute to the evidence; we’ll be able to measure progress; and we’ll be able to see how interprofessional education translates to better outcomes in the clinical setting with our patients,” she said. “I think it’s going to give Duke an opportunity to become and remain a leader in interprofessional education and team training.”



Creating the Duke Health Interprofessional Education and Care Center brought teams from DUSON and the School of Medicine’s Department of Physical Therapy and Department of Orthopedic Surgery under one roof.

Expanding Nursing’s Voice

Broome and Howard agree that the IPEC will benefit nursing specifically by highlighting the contributions of nurses, who historically have tended to be less vocal than other health care professionals. “I think it’s going to raise awareness of the many roles and responsibilities that nurses have within that health care team,” Howard said. “Many other professions focus on disease or one particular body system; it can be very segmented. I think that with the IPEC Center, we have a chance to make sure everyone understands that patient-centered care and health promotion is at the heart of nursing. It’s our foundation.”

“Thinking and speaking up require that you understand what you have to add to the conversation — what is the unique perspective that you as a nurse can contribute?” Broome said. “However, in order to have confidence to speak up, you need to practice those skills in a safe space. The IPEC Center and practice in the simulation environment will provide our students that safe space.”

Broome is optimistic that both the current and future generations of students will flourish in an interprofessional model. “They’re very good at working on teams,” she said. “Our students want to work with other smart and competent people — they just want to get to work.”

She believes that these interprofessional partnerships are well suited for digital-age students. “They are very good at navigating information, gathering and sharing knowledge. Creating intentional interprofessional experiences will further enhance those abilities.

“Our students today bring some skills to this interprofessional opportunity that previous generations did not. I think that will catapult us into the future and hopefully enable all health professionals to provide better care.” ■

