



Partnership in Practice: A Joint Training Initiative Between Social Work and Health

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This paper will introduce a case example of 'joined-up training', based on an initiative developed between the Medical School and the School of Social Work at the University of Leicester.

The programme has been running as a joint initiative since 1999, and it brings together trainee health professionals (doctors and nurses) and social workers in a joint investigation based around one G.P. practice in the city. This practice itself has gained wide recognition for its pioneering work in promoting inter-disciplinary models of intervention and community development, so it provides a very fertile base for this kind of learning. Students from the various disciplines are recruited into teams to carry out a brief (four three hour sessions) but intensive piece of work based around the experience of individual patients of the practice, which offers a series of positive learning opportunities:

1. Students are enabled to develop an understanding of the perspectives and preconceptions that other disciplines bring to a practice setting.
2. Students from these different disciplines can begin to identify common areas of interest and professional concern.
3. A 'holistic' approach to assessment can be developed and applied, consistent with the new models emerging in both children's and adult services.
4. Policy and structural issues affecting the viability and effectiveness of interdisciplinary working can be identified and explored.

By undertaking a collective task of investigating patients' circumstances, developing an assessment of their needs and aspirations, identifying barriers and shortcomings in existing services, and compiling a feedback report based on their observations, students are enabled both to experience and to begin to resolve some of the key challenges involved in partnership working. At the same time, the opportunity to reflect on the experience and enhance their learning is provided, and the experience can be linked to core themes of social work training, particularly in areas such as developing communication and assessment skills, and networking and liaison with professional colleagues.

The programme has been thoroughly evaluated, and it regularly produces very high appreciation scores from students of all disciplines involved. Benefits are also identified more broadly in promoting inter-agency understanding, and indeed, producing direct benefits for some of the patients/service users who participate. The paper will also draw attention to the potential benefit of this kind of collaborative initiative to agencies, training bodies, students and policy-makers; it will conclude by suggesting that the gains identified suggest that this kind of opportunity should be incorporated more centrally into social work and other professional training courses.



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