

BSW Students Learn the Importance of INTERPROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION

By Adelia Henderson

Huddled around a table sit a social worker, a pharmacist, a physician and a nurse practitioner. They are intently discussing how best to treat their patient, a 64-year old man who went to the emergency room complaining of weakness and excessive thirst.

Instead of this conversation taking place in a hospital with licensed professionals, the scene paints a different picture: all the discussants are University of Georgia students.

The second-annual Interprofessional Education (IPE) Day was held Oct. 23 at The Classic Center in Athens. The event was held in conjunction with UGA's School of Social Work, College of Pharmacy, the Augusta University/UGA Medical Partnership and AU's College of Nursing in Athens.

Over 250 social work, pharmacy, medical and nursing students attended.

Activities such as IPE Day are a way of preparing health professionals to perform in effective and collaborative teams, said Susan Fagan, assistant dean of the Augusta University program.

"Interprofessional teams in the health sphere have been shown to enhance the quality of care, reduce costs, reduce length of stay for hospitalized patients and reduce medical errors," Fagan said at the event.



The collaborative discussions helped students work out issues that the professionals may run into in real life.

“When interprofessional collaboration occurs on teams, social workers have an opportunity to educate other professionals on the holistic needs of the patient in all areas of their life. This can lead to a greater awareness of the socio-cultural needs of patients,” said Rebecca Wells, coordinator of the Master of Social Work/ Master of Public Health dual degree program.

“The team can use these insights to partner with the patient and patient’s family to build more effective treatment plans that result in better patient outcomes and improved quality of life,” Wells said.

Information about the hypothetical patient was only given to one student per team, in order to mimic real-life scenarios.

“Just like on rounds, only one person has the information,” Fagan said.

Students deliberated for a half-hour during the first round, then were given additional information about their patient that was relevant to each profession. The students then went through the case again, each contributing what they learned from their profession’s perspective. Pharmacy Professor Brian Seagraves is on the board of directors for the Athens Nurses Clinic, a free healthcare clinic for uninsured and low income Athens-Clarke County residents. He knows firsthand the value social workers add to team-based care.

“I love (social workers), they have been absolutely invaluable,” Seagraves said. “They’re of value to the patient, (and) they’re of value to me.”

Seagraves said that after adding a social worker to his teams, the patient’s level of adherence, or how closely they follow medical advice, increased greatly.



Social work, pharmacy, medical and nursing student teams collaborate at IPE Day.

Laurie Anderson

“It made a big difference,” he said. “We’re actually able to get these people cured and most of the time get them back to work and get them to be members of society...it’s really a cool thing.”

Wells hopes that the social work students who participated in IPE Day recognize the strength of other disciplines, as well as impact their own voices have.

“These students will one day be leaders on the front lines providing care and support to patients and clients, and interprofessional education and collaboration will enable them to be leaders in their future professions,” she said.