

SHARP: Students Helping At Risk Patients to Promote Health and Reduce Disparities

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Background/Objectives:

Research demonstrates that Interprofessional (IP) care teams can improve transitional care, reduce re-admissions and improve patient health status, contributing to reduction in health disparities. This is particularly important for patients with chronic illness from underserved and underinsured populations. The purpose of SHARP is to allow students to learn about working in IP teams as they support, educate and navigate patients through their often-complex health care ambulatory experiences.

Setting and Participants:

During the 2017-2018 academic year, 28 students from the advanced masters in nursing program, social work program and the school of medicine supported 8 patients with chronic heart failure from the UAB Heart Failure Transitional Care Clinic for Adults. SHARP student teams learned about IP teams and then met their patients to derive follow up tasks in order to help and support their patients according to their individualized greatest areas of need. Tasks included: 1) assessing patient physical and social environment and identifying community resources to support patients; 2) providing patient medication or disease education; 3) assisting with dietary education and device acquisition; 4) encouraging and reiterating the importance of compliance with medications and treatment plans and; 5) assisting patients with their follow up from referrals and patient appointments.

Description/Methods:

An IP team of educators convened to develop and integrate SHARP within existing clinical courses. Measures were selected to assess student learning, transitional care skills, assess patient experiences and potential health system benefits. Through the SHARP Pilot program, we assessed logistics such as team coordination needs, patient selection partnerships and processes, patient retention, patient communication and support needs.

Student groups met formally on four occasions during the pilot program:

1. Introduction to the program and the IP concepts
2. Initial meetings with patients face-to-face, assessment of patient needs
3. “Check in” telephone calls with their patients to assess progress and emerging needs
4. Final face-to-face meeting with the patients, and groups to share progress and receive feedback

Additionally, several of the student groups communicated informally with their assigned patients, developed educational materials and provided other useful information to them based on each patient’s individual preferences and needs.

Evaluation/Results:

Since all the student participants in the pilot were volunteers, their baseline IP Attitudes scores were high, however these all showed some increase at the end of the activity. All the comments from both the patients and students were positive, including;

“It is a great program...The students are great; eager to learn.” Patient

“This experience was very beneficial to learning about other professions and how to effectively work together” Student

Discussion/Reflection:

The primary objective of the SHARP program is to educate students on the benefits and application of IP care models. However, this program has also shown students that their educational goals can align with improving patient outcomes and satisfaction, reducing healthcare costs and taking a meaningful role in their patients’ health. Our healthcare system is moving to more integrated care in order to provide better care for patients at lower costs all while improving reliability. This program is well-suited to train a generation of healthcare workers who appreciate and thrive in such a model.