

A Service Learning Project on Inter-Professional Collaboration to promote health and wellness in community organisations

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1. INTRODUCTION

Service learning (SL) is a new subject in PolyU and it is effective to let healthcare professions students learn about serving people in the community. Students have to organize activities that are health-related, yet these are not confined to their respective healthcare professional boundaries. Integrating this subject into the professional curriculum of the healthcare disciplines is timely and well aligned with the current worldwide trend of embracing inter-professional collaboration in healthcare. In the following sections, the organization and the outcome of this subject will be discussed.

2. METHOD

This subject was offered for the first time by the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences in Semester 2, 2013-14. The subject aims to provide needed services for the NGO's while letting students have a first-hand experience of organizing and planning these activities. The experience would also enhance their generic competencies such as leadership, problem-solving and teamwork, as well as develop their social awareness.

120 students from general and mental health nursing, physiotherapy, and radiography programs were enrolled in the subject. The students were divided into 4 tutorial groups, and each group worked with a NGO partner. They received lectures the first 5 weeks, which focused on basic principles and knowledge such as professional ethics, and common problems of clients. Each group was led by an experienced physiotherapist or occupational therapist. Table 1 is a summary of the 4 groups, their NGO partners and activities performed.

3. RESULTS

At the beginning, the students were encouraged to come up with innovative ideas and design the activities they wanted to deliver. Prior input was also sought from the NGO partners for some directions of the activities. In the end, some groups conducted exercise classes with the clients, while other activities such as "snack-making" and "magic show" were initiated by students. All the participants enjoyed the activities very much, and established rapport with students.

Students were assessed on their performance in the service delivery in several ways, which included keeping a brief logbook, group presentation, reflective journal and class attendance. Students have expressed their views very positively in the reflective journals.

Table 1: NGO partners and service learning activities of 4 tutorial groups

Group	NGO partner	Description of NGO	Activities
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1	Wai Ji Christian Service	Provide residential and daytime services to people with mild to moderate level of intelligent disability (ID).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. health assessment 2. snack-making and magic 3. mini-sports day 4. video production –exercises for stroke patients
2	Hong Kogn PHAB Association (Unity Place)	Provide services for clients with different physical and mental impairments.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. health assessment 2. exercise groups 3. health talks 4. snack-making
3	Helping Hand (Po Lam Jockey Club Housing for the Elderly)	Elderly residents are independent for their daily life activities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. physical and cognitive assessment 2. cognitive stimulation games 3. snacks making
4	YWCA (Wan Wah Care & Attention Home for The Elderly)	Residence for elderly persons with different levels of physical or mental disabilities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. exercise groups 2. dementia training groups 3. small groups for bed bounded clients 4. outdoor walking groups

Following the completion of the subject in May 2014, the teaching team conducted focus group interviews with the students and the comments were very positive. Here are a few examples:

- The students were amazed that MR and elderly clients are way more independent and intelligent than expected. Most students said they had changed their perceptions of different people now, and this will affect how they approach their clinical patients in the future.
- They experienced difficulties in working with other teammates. They tried different methods to improve the teamwork and overcome problems that arose in the process.
- The NGO staff were very supportive and had good communication with students

Focus groups were also conducted with the liaison persons from the 4 NGOs and their comments were useful for making improvements in future running of this subject.

Benefits to clients and center:

- Students were well organized and conducted events systematically for clients in respective centers
- The center staff appreciated the debriefing session by tutors after each service session, which made them understand more about the students' learning.
- This is a good experience for students to appreciate the reality of workplace, and they can build up their work sense and communication skills with clients.

Suggestions for improvement:

- More training was needed for students to talk actively with clients.
- The schedule was very tight that no room for make-up sessions whenever necessary

The Office of Service Learning at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University conducted an independent survey before and after the subject was run. The results revealed statistically significant improvement in the generic competencies of the students – in the 4 items of (i) interpersonal effectiveness, (ii) teamwork, (iii) problem-solving, and (iv) social responsibility. These results are very rewarding for the teaching team indeed.

4. CONCLUSION

On the whole, both the staff and the students found this experience very useful to prepare them for their future clinical placements. It is envisaged that this subject will continue to grow and provide useful services for the local community as well as our students. In the academic year 2014-15, this subject will be offered in both Semester 1 and 2. Based on the experience gained in the previous year, we plan to improve the organization of the tutorial groups and the activities for the NGO. New NGO partners are also being explored and we hope to make the experience to be even more fruitful for the students.