Interprofessional Collaboration with your Health Sciences Librarians

By Carmen Howard

If you are in the health professions and especially if you are involved in health professions education, you have probably heard plenty about interprofessional collaboration lately. A quick search in PubMed on the phrase “interprofessional collaboration” yields 748 citations with almost a quarter of those published this year alone (searched 10/15/2015). However, interprofessional collaboration is a concept that we’ve been talking about and practicing for years under different names. In their 2010 report, *Health Professionals for a New Century: Transforming Education to Strengthen Health Systems in an Interdependent World*, Frenk, et.al. said “…teamwork has always been necessary and practiced, and the question has been whether it is recognized, promoted, and prioritized.” Fortunately, the time is now for that recognition, promotion, and prioritization, and the UIC Library of the Health Sciences is ready to collaborate.

Health Sciences librarians thrive on collaboration and strive to “conduct all professional relationships with courtesy and respect.” We encourage health professions faculty to think of library faculty when looking for partners. One of the key messages found in the World Health Organization’s *Framework for Action on Interprofessional Education & Collaborative Practice* is:

> Collaborative practice happens when multiple health workers from different professional backgrounds work together with patients, families, carers and communities to deliver the highest quality of care. It allows health workers to engage any individual whose skills can help achieve local health goals.

One recent and ongoing example of how UIC library faculty are collaborating with educators in the health professions is the Nursing Experts: Translating the Evidence project, or NExT. NExT officially began in the Spring of 2014, but the collaboration began long before then. The UIC Library of the Health Sciences at Peoria and the UIC College of Nursing at Peoria have been partnering to bring educational sessions to public health nurses for over a decade. However, with the NExT project, the team decided to take our collaboration to the next level by incorporating librarians and nurses from our Chicago, Peoria, Rockford, and Urbana campuses and nursing faculty at Western Illinois University.

Our vision was to provide evidence-based practice workshops to public health nurses throughout the state of Illinois. The educational content would rely on the expertise of nurse and librarian teams, and the state would be divided into six regions. With financial support from the National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services (under Contract No. HHSN-276-2011- 00005C with the
University of Illinois at Chicago), the workshops would be held locally, conducted by the regional teams, and offer free continuing education credits (CEUs) for nurses. Additionally, the workshop content would be transformed into a free online course, with free CEUs, for those not able to attend a session in person.

The collaborating began immediately as the team worked to create the educational content to be taught at the workshops. Monthly meetings were held via conference call, and cloud storage options were utilized. As tasks were divided up and smaller subgroups were formed, working relationships became closer despite the varying educational backgrounds and the miles between the team members. As the educational content was solidified and the workshops began to be scheduled, our teaching partnerships began to strengthen. By the time each partnership began presenting the workshops, we had become true collaborators with each team deciding who would present the content in areas where our expertise overlapped.

Ultimately, the project has been a truly collaborative success. Faculty have pulled together on many levels—as a whole team, in task forces, and as teaching partners. The project benefitted from our cooperation in the following ways:

- geographically dispersed faculty were able to reach more public health nurses with less money required for travel,
- varying educational backgrounds and expertise strengthened the educational content delivered, and
- access to staffing and services available in more than one department and institution provided a solid infrastructure within which the project could operate.

However, the project was not the only beneficiary of this collaboration. The team members also benefited from:

- a better understanding of the other profession’s viewpoint and expertise,
- an awareness of opportunities for future collaboration, and
- insight into our own profession’s reputation.

The project has been so successful with both its outcomes and relationships that the team decided to pursue further funding. In the Spring of 2015, NExT won another award from the Greater Midwest Region of the National Network of Libraries of Medicine (the National Library of Medicine/National Institutes of Health regional office that funded the initial project also.) The second phase continues the important workshop sessions and adds a few new objectives as well. Among these new objectives is the creation of a mobile website, which has added yet another collaborative element to the project. We have begun working with technology experts in the UIC Library Systems department, a group of professionals that brings a new perspective and educational background to the project. This collaboration again helps to improve our outcomes, which ultimately is the goal of every endeavor.

Whether you are interested in starting a new collaborative research project or simply looking for team members from another profession to add to your existing group, I
encourage you to consider a librarian. We are ready to work with you in achieving another of the key messages from the World Health Organization: “A collaborative practice-ready health worker is someone who has learned how to work in an interprofessional team and is competent to do so.”

Contact your library liaison today: http://go.uic.edu/liaison

References


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