Impact of a Stand-Alone Communication Course Series Integrated with Pharmacotherapy Courses and IPPEs

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OBJECTIVES
- The ability to effectively communicate with patients, family members, physicians, nurses, and other health care providers is an essential skill required to be an effective pharmacist in any practice setting.
- The development and application of communication skills are important in pharmacy students’ educational career and crucial to provide the foundation for further practice and refinement of these communication skills during practice.
- Communication skills may be overlooked or de-emphasized in pharmacy curricula focused in content-heavy science courses. When integrated with other curricular content, the amount and quality of communication skills may not sufficiently address student needs or identify gaps in student abilities related to communication skills. This approach may also give students the impression that communication skills are less important than other curricular content.

In 2012, the University of Colorado Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences (SSPS) renewed their curriculum and an independent patient-centered communication course series was introduced.

Prior to 2012, communication skills and courses focused on patient-centered practice were only taught in independent 3-credit Patient-Centered Communication and Pharmacotherapy courses and IPPEs. This was a retrospective cohort study, two years after implementation of curricular renewal.

METHODS

Expected Outcomes
- The 22 specific outcomes of the PCC course series were designed to incorporate the Ability Based Outcomes (ABOs) expected of the Doctor of Pharmacy graduates. The following ABOs were specifically addressed in this course series:
  - Exhibit the highest standards of professional and ethical behavior in pharmacy practice
  - Effectively provide patient education for self-care products
  - Provide patient education for prescription medications
  - Complete an accurate assessment based on a medical/medication history that is compiled and interpreted appropriately
  - Effectively communicate and collaborate with other health care professionals
  - Effectively communicate and collaborate with patients regarding their health care needs
  - Effectively obtain patient-specific information from health records
  - Effectively obtain patient history from patients
  - Effectively document medication history

Pedagogy and Educational Environment
- The PCC course series was a variety of teaching and learning methods, including self-study, interactive didactic teaching, active-learning sessions, simulated formative assessments with standardized patients, group projects, and experiential and experiential learning.
- Seven major communications tasks were taught and evaluated: 1) taking a medical history, 2) taking a medication history, 3) counseling on a self-care product, 4) counseling on a prescription medication, 5) medication reconciliation/communicating with a provider, 6) presenting a patient to a preceptor, and 7) writing a SOAP note.
- Major topics were introduced during a 1-hour didactic session where appropriate behaviors were modeled and students were provided with rubrics and expectations for assessment. During the 3-hour active-learning session, students practiced communication skills with a peer (using the provided rubric), then practiced with a standardized patient or faculty member with feedback, followed by an evaluation.
- Other communication topics were integrated including health literacy, cultural competence, and motivational interviewing.

Evaluations
- Major evaluations were simulated OSCE-type evaluations.
- Other components of course grades included formative feedback, verbal evaluation questions, written patient education group assignment, group presentation, and IPPE assignments.

Course Integration
- The courses were purposefully integrated with Self-Care Pharmacotherapy, Pharmacotherapy, and IPPEs where appropriate.
- Six activities, developed by the PCC course directors, were required during the community IPPE visits throughout the first professional year. The activities were graded components of the PCC courses.
- Two evaluations were integrated with Self-Care Pharmacotherapy (taking a medical history and self-care product counseling), and one was integrated with Pharmacotherapy (taking a prescription medication). Communication skills were evaluated by the PCC course content and evaluated by the other course.

Implements
- Implementation of a stand-alone patient-centered communications course series was effective at achieving patient-centered communication outcomes and improving students’ self-perceived preparation for communication-based activities.
- Students attitudes about teaching and learning methods were more positive in the renewed curriculum compared with the previous curriculum.

RESULTS

Preparedness and Attitudes Survey
- 113 students completed the PCC courses in the academic years 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 (Class of 2016 = 156 students; Class of 2017 = 163 students).
- 223 (70%) completed the survey.
- 127 P3 students in the prior curriculum also completed the survey.
- Pre-course preparedness surveys revealed that the majority of students who took the PCC course series felt well prepared or very well prepared with 15 of 18 preparedness questions.
- Preparedness responses were more positive from students taking the renewed curriculum compared to P3 students in the prior curriculum.
- Students attitudes in the renewed curriculum were more positive in 12 of 12 questions compared to those in the prior curriculum.

Post-course preparedness surveys revealed that the majority of students who took the course series felt well prepared or very well prepared with 15 of 18 preparedness questions. Preparedness responses were more positive from students taking the renewed curriculum compared to P3 students in the prior curriculum. Students attitudes in the renewed curriculum were more positive in 12 of 12 questions compared to those in the prior curriculum.

Evaluations
- The majority of students who completed the PCC courses met or exceeded expectations for the 7 simulated exams.

OBJECTIVES
- To determine how two stand-alone communication courses impact pharmacy students’ preparedness for and achievement of patient-centered communication skills.
- To assess students’ attitudes regarding the teaching and learning methods utilized in the courses.

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