The Richmond Health and Wellness Program:
Making an Impact on Students and Communities

The Richmond Health and Wellness Program (RHWP) is an interprofessional education and practice model funded through the Health Resources and Services Administration. The program, now completing its first year, seeks to improve the health of older adults in some of Richmond’s neediest areas. Many of these patients have numerous barriers that hinder their ability to manage their health. The program tries to help these individuals be healthier and also “age in place”, avoiding having to live in more expensive housing settings like nursing homes.

Every Thursday, the program provides an on-site health and care coordination clinic for older adults residing within senior apartment buildings. Supervised by faculty, students see patients in interprofessional teams which may include third-year medical students, nurse practitioner or BSN nursing students, third-year pharmacy students, and masters social work students. The students sometimes make “housecalls” by visiting a resident’s apartment. These visits occur at the request of the resident and usually involve residents with a change in health status such as recent hospitalization, emergency room visit, or nursing home stay.

The RHWP makes a difference for residents, students and faculty. For example, a resident recently presented to the clinic with a concern over his diabetes medications. This gentleman had experienced shakiness at a local store, and the emergency medical services team was called to the scene. He was found to have low blood sugar. The following day, he came to the clinic for the first time. The students discovered the patient was unable to understand the instructions for his insulin. He had run out of his long-acting insulin and had substituted the short-acting insulin in its place. The team uncovered the problem, educated the patient, and contacted his primary care provider about the need for increased medication teaching in the future. Not just patients are impacted by stories like this one — many students continue to volunteer at the site even after completion of academic requirements.

During the last year, the RHWP has grown from 40 to 116 residents. In collaboration with the Better Housing Coalition, the program will expand to a second building in the Fall of 2014 and three additional senior high-rise building in January 2015. For more about the RHWP, view the recent television segment about the program produced by the local PBS station’s Virginia Currents show at: [http://video.idealstations.org/video/2365234662/](http://video.idealstations.org/video/2365234662/)
Dr. Parsons serves as Assistant Professor and Nurse Practitioner within the Department of Internal Medicine at Virginia Commonwealth University, as well as Affiliate Faculty with the VCU School of Nursing. She has 20 years of experience as a Geriatric Nurse Practitioner, providing care to complex chronically ill and frail older adults across the care continuum. She is a Board Member for the Lucy Corr Foundation and has assisted with the development of an on-site dental program to provide services to residents within the nursing home as well as extending these services to underserved community dwelling residents in the Richmond-Tri-cities area. She is core faculty on the statewide Virginia Geriatric Education Center, funded through the Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA), with a goal of improving the education of faculty and clinical providers in the care of older adults across the Commonwealth. In July 2013, Dr. Parsons led a team that received a three-year award from HRSA through the Nurse Education Practice, Quality and Retention- Interprofessional Collaborative Practice (NEPQR) program to refine and expand the Richmond Health and Wellness Program, a community-based model of interprofessional care targeting underserved vulnerable older adults residing in senior apartment buildings. Dr. Parsons received her doctoral training at Virginia Commonwealth University in the School of Nursing.

The keynote speaker was Barbara Brandt, PhD, Associate Vice President for Education at the Academic Health Center at the University of Minnesota and Director of the National Center for Interprofessional Practice and Education. The focus of her presentation highlighted the goals and logic model for the National Center.

Dr. Brandt's talk, and the panel discussion that followed, generated a number of questions, such as: Where should we focus our team-based practice efforts for the highest impact? How can high-functioning teams in the current health care delivery system be showcased effectively to inform others? In places where such teams are working well together, how do we incorporate students so teams can model these skills? And, how can students have meaningful roles on high-functioning teams to learn how to collaborate in their future practice? These questions, highlights from Dr. Brandt’s visit to VCU, and an overview of the Emswiller Symposium were featured in a story on the National Center's website here earlier this year.

Be sure to mark your calendar! Next year's Emswiller Symposium will be held on Saturday, March 21, 2015 with a theme of: Providing the Care the Community Needs.
CLARION Competition

On Saturday, March 1st, 2014, the Second Annual VCU CLARION Interprofessional Team Case Competition was held. Student teams, representing Health Administration, Medicine, and Pharmacy presented to a panel of four faculty judges their analysis of a fictional healthcare system struggling to adequately care for heart failure patients. The students described detailed solutions for specific problems they identified along with implementation strategies and financial considerations for these solutions.

“The CLARION competition provided a great experience in working with students from other professions,” said Natalie Nguyen, a May School of Pharmacy graduate. “Through the past three months, we have all come to appreciate the expertise and perspectives that each of the members were able to contribute to the competition. The competition challenged me to think outside of my “clinical” approach of improving the quality and cost-effectiveness of health care for individual patients, and to consider how we can improve the process for the health of our entire community. I look forward to working with these amazing people in the future as fellow healthcare professionals.

The winning team, including Natalie, represented VCU at the national Competition on Saturday, April 12th, 2014 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Faculty Development: Untangling the Knot of Collaboration

This spring, fifty faculty members were joined by several students in a faculty development session entitled, “Untangling the Knot of Collaboration”. The session, based on an article about knotworking and interprofessional practice, used the metaphor of untangling a knot to inspire discussion about how interprofessional teams collaborate to help patients and communities. The participants identified effective communication, conflict resolution, and shared leadership as key skills for successful collaboration. They also discussed how curriculum at the level of health sciences education can help build competency in these skills.

Kevin Harris, one of the attendees and Assistant Vice President for Health Sciences, summed up the goal of the exercise when he noted, “We need to be thinking about IPE with these ends in mind and then develop instructional activities and assessments that support our students reaching these goals”.

As we work toward these and other goals, make sure to look for more IPE Faculty Seminar opportunities like this coming in Fall 2014.
Change is all around us in healthcare. Changes in healthcare have dominated the political discussion over the past five years, and, at a state level, the debate over whether or not to expand Medicaid has brought the budget process to a standstill. Meanwhile, health systems, including VCU Health System, are acquiring, affiliating, and merging to try to adapt to the changing environment. Within this dizzying evolution in care, individuals and families, who continue to identify health as the primary concern, are trying to figure out what these changes mean to them and how best to sustain health in the future.

In this issue, we focused on how the Center is preparing students and practitioners to help patients and families navigate these challenges. The Richmond Health and Wellness Program provides a novel approach to community-integrated health promotion and care coordination for students and faculty. The Clarion competition teaches students to think broadly about a population’s health and how to craft economically feasible solutions to health problems across a community. And the Emswiller Symposium and faculty development activities promote the complex problem-skills needed in today’s dynamic environment.

As always, if you have a great idea for interprofessional education or practice, or would like to be more involved in some of the ongoing programs, contact us by email at ipecenter@vcu.edu. You can also like us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter. We look forward to meeting the challenges ahead with you.

— Alan Dow
Director, Center for IPE&CC