Interprofessional teacher: Teaching students in other health professions than your own

Pedagogiskt docenturarbete

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Introduction

Interprofessional collaboration refers to the collaboration between two or more professions in order to reach common goals (1). Interprofessional collaboration and education may improve patient outcomes (2-3) and has been highlighted as an important strategy to meet the demands of future health care (4-5). Interprofessional learning in Medicine and Health Care Sciences has received growing interest over the last decades and is now part of the curriculum in Medicine at several universities in Sweden (6). Although interprofessional learning has received a lot of attention, it focuses mainly on interprofessional learning between students. However, to provide students with a wide range of knowledge, teachers with specific competencies and areas of expertise are needed in Medical and Health Care Sciences curriculum. For instance, nutrition has been highlighted as important, yet overlooked, component in the Medical curriculum given the strong link between nutritional status and health outcomes (7-8). However, little is known about how teachers from other disciplines (e.g. nutrition) conduct teaching with students from other health care profession programs.

The aim of this pedagogical reflection was to examine how experienced teachers in nutrition conduct teaching activities with students from other programs within the Medical Faculty. This relates to my own background as a registered dietitian and my teaching in nutrition with students from various programs at the Medical Faculty (e.g. the Medical Program, Physiotherapy Program and Experimental and Industrial Biomedicine Program).

Methods

I conducted a focus group interview, over Zoom in August 2020, with four experienced teachers in nutrition. They all had teched nutrition at different universities for other health professionals (e.g. students in Medicine, nursing, physiotherapy) for more than 10 years. An interview guide was constructed before the interview (see Appendix 1). During the interview, questions were asked to the participants with follow-up questions if needed. The focus group interview lasted for approximately 45 minutes and it was transcribed and then analyzed resulting in four major themes.
Results

Comparison between teaching nutrition students and students in other health professions

The teachers reported that there were some differences between teaching nutrition students and students in other health professions that were considered especially important. For instance, they highlighted the importance to make the teaching relevant for the target audience. One way of making the content more relevant was to put it in context to their respective future health professional role and adapt examples, patients accordingly. The teachers believed that more adaptations were needed as the students progressed through their educational programs. Furthermore, teachers reported that students in other health professions had more varied previous knowledge in nutrition mostly based on own interest.

Nevertheless, the teachers generally believe that there were many similarities compared to their ordinary teaching in nutrition programs. For instance, they reported that they prepared the teaching quite similarly, e.g. by examining the program syllabus, teaching goals, discussions with responsible teachers, examining the students’ previous knowledge etc.

Strategies to successfully teach nutrition to students in other health professions

The respondents provided several advice/strategies to improve teaching. First, the teachers highlighted the need to be well prepared. For instance, it was considered essential to be well aware of the learning objectives as well as to know the level of the students’ previous knowledge. The respondents also sought advice from other teachers for planning and executing the teaching activities. It was also considered important to know what kind of expectations that were put on you as a teacher as the respondents thought that there sometimes was too high expectations on what the students would learn during the few hours of teaching. One teacher also said that it was important to be well prepared mentally as the teaching sometime was more demanding with students with another background.

Second, the teachers also discussed the need to adapt the content by i) working with concrete examples and patient data relevant for the students’ future health professions ii) the importance to be able to adapt to teaching situation (e.g. increase/decrease the level of the content, repeat or rephrase slides if students do not seem to understand). iii) one teacher also highlighted the potential for interactive components such as Socrative and Kahoot to receive information about the students’ level of knowledge and learning.
Advantages with teaching nutrition to students in other health professions
The teachers thought that there were several advantages by teaching students in other health professional. The major advantage was considered the ability to provide in-depth knowledge regarding nutrition. Furthermore, the responds also said that many of the students had a lot of practical nutritional-related questions with importance for clinical care that they had not though of before. Finally, the teachers also pointed out that they thought it was enjoyable and motivating to teach nutrition to other health professional students.

Challenges with teaching nutrition to students in other health professions
The teachers thought that one of the main challenges was that the nutrition education often was scattered around the curriculum with little connection to surrounding lectures and other teaching activities. Also, the limited time devoted to nutrition in the curriculum was also a challenge and teachers though that they sometimes had to choose between providing an overview to nutrition or focus on certain specific topics. Furthermore, teachers reported that they had little time to prepare and conduct nutrition teaching although they considered it to take a lot of time to make the adaptations needed. Finally, some of the teachers thought that it was sometimes difficult to find the appropriate level of teaching since the students' level of previous knowledge varied considerably.

Discussion and Reflection
Comparison with previous literature
Previous literature describing the experience of teachers from other professional backgrounds than the target audience are scarce. Nevertheless, it was clear that the preparation and conduct of the teaching in nutrition was quite comparable to their ordinary teaching. Regardless of the subject, teachers reflect on the relations between i) the teacher and the students ii) the teacher and the subject and iii) the students and the subject (e.g. the didactic triangle) (9).

In an interesting piece, Hay and colleagues provided advice and reflections for academic teachers (10). One focus on the article is that EBO (Engagement including empathy, Enthusiasm and Organization) are essential for a university teacher. This agrees well with the views with the teachers in my interview. To understand the students and their previous knowledge and properly adapting the lectures shows empathy as well as engagement. The interviewed teachers also highlighted the need of being prepared (both in the pre-lecture work
as well as mentally before the teaching) which may be reconciled with the organizational skills.

The main advantages raised by the interviewed teachers was the ability to provide in-depth nutritional knowledge in the teaching. Adequate subject knowledge is a prerequisite for teaching (9) and is hardly surprising regarded as essential for a university teacher (11). Interestingly, the teachers also found teaching nutrition to other health professions to be fun and enjoyable. Although it may seem trivial, enthusiasm towards teaching and the subjects has been considered by both teachers (9) and students (11) to be one of the most important traits of university teachers.

There were also challenges mentioned by the interviewed teachers. The teachers thought that the nutrition teaching sometimes was scattered across the curriculum and that they had to few hours for providing the students with basic knowledge. This agrees well with recent studies that found nutrition to be insufficiently incorporated in education in medicine (7-8). Another challenge was the lack to time to conduct the teaching which is troublesome although a high workload is a common in university teaching (12).

**Personal experiences and reflections**

I thought it was very interesting to obtain the views of experienced teachers in nutrition. I agree with many of their thoughts, e.g. the importance to connect the teaching to the students future health profession and the surrounding lectures and courses, to thoroughly examine what the students are supposed to learn from the lectures and to receive feedback regarding the teaching from colleagues. I would also highlight the importance of obtaining feedback from the students which is especially important when organizing new teaching activities. I also share the teachers' view that the nutrition education sometimes is scattered across the curriculum. Nevertheless, I also have positive experiences in which the nutrition education is put in a more comprehensible context. For instance, during the first semester in the Medicine program, the nutrition education is closely aligned with the metabolism teaching in the Gastro-Nutrition-Metabolism (GNM) theme which shows that it is possible to organize the nutrition teaching in a better way.
As the experienced teachers described there are several advantages and challenges with teaching nutrition to students of other health professions. Nevertheless, I believe that the advantages outweigh the challenges. Interestingly, my teaching is also very comparable to my research, i.e. interprofessional with many different health professions represented.
References


Appendix 1. Frågeguide

Frågor till fokusgruppen

1. Hur brukar du göra när du undervisar i nutrition för studenter från andra utbildningar (än nutrition)?
   - Förberedelser
   - Under själva föreläsningen
   - Efterarbete
   - Skiljer det sig åt mellan undervisningsformer (t.ex. föreläsning, seminarium etc.)

2. Är det någon skillnad i hur ni undervisar studenter från andra utbildningar (än nutrition)? I så fall, på vilket sätt?
   - Förberedelser
   - Under själva föreläsningen
   - Efterarbete
   - Skiljer det sig åt mellan undervisningsformer (t.ex. föreläsning, seminarium etc.)

3. Vilka råd skulle ni ge en kollega som ska undervisa om nutrition för studenter från andra utbildningar? Vad är viktigt att tänka på?

4. Vad är det viktigaste att göra som lärare för att studenterna ska förstå undervisningen?

5. Vilka utmaningar och svårigheter finns det när läraren kommer från en annan profession än studenterna?

6. Vad ser du för fördelar att du som lärare kommer från annan profession än studenterna?

7. Vad ser du för nackdelar att du som lärare kommer från annan profession än studenterna?

Bakgrundsfrågor:

1. Hur gammal är du?
2. Vad har du för utbildning?
3. Hur många år har du undervisat studenter vid universitet/högskola?
4. Hur många år har du undervisat studenter från annan hälsovårdspersonal vid universitet/högskola och i vilken omfattning?