Interprofessional Education

Rex Hobbs, program director of the LMU-DCOM Physician Assistant Program and associate professor of physician assistant studies, has received a new assignment in recent months: to direct LMU-DCOM’s new Center for Interprofessional Education (IPE).

In the World Health Organization’s 2010 publication Framework for Action on Interprofessional Education & Collaborative Practice: “interprofessional education occurs when students from two or more professions learn about, from and with each other to enable effective collaboration and improve health outcomes. Interprofessional education is a necessary step in preparing a ‘collaborative practice-ready’ health workforce that is better prepared to respond to local health needs.”

“IPE is not a new concept,” Hobbs said. “It really embodies the idea of a team approach to optimizing patient care. But it’s become more of a buzzword over the past five to 10 years due to things on the national front, like patient care and patient satisfaction issues. Many of those track back to communication issues. What are ways we can minimize patient errors?

“It gets back to people working together in the health care setting. And it’s also about knowing what other professions do. For example, a patient might benefit from occupational therapy, but the provider might not refer the patient for OT because he or she simply doesn’t know anything about it.”

IPE comes in many curricular forms and is now a requirement for several health care professions, including physicians, physician assistants and nurses. “It may be something as simple as having a pharmacist come in to talk during the DO curriculum,” Hobbs said. “It can be informational. As we go up the order, there may be mixed group discussion. DO, PA and nursing students might be put together to hold a patient care scenario or peer teaching. The higher level would be a shared simulation with physicians, PAs, pharmacists and nurses to work as a team to effectively manage the patient. The best model for IPE is a combination of all these things.”

No matter when a health care professional received his or her education, IPE is now something many practitioners must care about, as the concept of IPE is beginning to drive how practitioners are evaluated for continued certification and licensure.

“It gets into a lot of professional competencies,” Hobbs said. “Every profession has competencies that are a benchmark of a truly effective professional. A lot of these are similar between the professions. Almost all of them embody the idea of a systems-based practice. When we talk about IPE, systems-based practice is how that is applied from a competency standpoint of a practitioner post-graduation.

“We need to have some type of educational model to help people be able to achieve an expert level of competency in systems-based practice. We are not going to wait until after you graduate and are in the field. We want to take it all the way back to when students are going through their professional education.”

For Hobbs, the first challenge in establishing the Center for IPE at LMU-DCOM is coming up with a curriculum that meets the needs of the various health professions on campus. Hobbs said, “There are several different bodies that have come up with objectives about what interprofessional education should look like.”

For right now, the program is still in its infancy. “The current idea is looking to at least developing a speaker’s bureau of individuals that are in the institution, as well as others that are in the area that are interested in speaking to the students,” Hobbs said. “They may also help facilitate small groups. The calendar is a challenge right now, but one commonality across all curriculums is that everybody’s got lunch. So we may have lunches and provide speakers to start.”

As the Center for IPE grows and expands its offerings, Hobbs envisions the center impacting the entire LMU campus. Hobbs said, “It brings advantages over time that ripple out into the institution itself. One bridge will form another bridge. As more bridges are developed, more things become possible.”