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Interprofessional ethics and professionalism debates: findings from a study involving physiotherapy and pharmacy students

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Abstract
Ethics is a core component of healthcare curricula and may provide ideal content for interprofessional education (IPE). An IPE debate in ethics and professionalism was developed for first year undergraduate pharmacy and physiotherapy students. A controlled “before-and-after” study was conducted. The opinion of students on IPE, the debate topics and debating was determined before and after the debate. While there was no impact on attitudes to IPE or healthcare professionals, students agreed that debating ethics through IPE was a valid teaching modality. Students found the debates challenging. They stimulated critical thinking and interest in complex and controversial issues. Students also found it of benefit to work as a team. We conclude that in-class debate is a useful way of learning together.

Methods
A controlled “before-and-after” study was conducted, with ethical approval granted from the RCSI Research Ethics Committee. Students were asked to complete the pre-debate questionnaires at the information session at the beginning of the semester and post-debate questionnaires immediately following the debates. The second year pharmacy students (n = 55), who did not participate in debates in their first year, were surveyed regarding the debate topics over the same timeframe. The four pharmacy-only debate teams allowed for an in-built control group with respect to IPE.

The validated instruments “The Readiness for Interprofessional Learning Scale” (RIPLS) and “The Attitudes to Health Professionals Questionnaire” (AHPQ) were used to assess the students’ attitudes to IPE and to healthcare professionals respectively (Lindqvist, Duncan, Shepstone, Watts, & Pearce, 2005; Parsell & Bligh, 1999).

Results and discussion
There were 76 (100%) responses pre-debate and 62 (82%) responses post-debate. They were matched pairs of pre and post intervention responses from 42 pharmacy students (84%; n = 42/50) and 20 physiotherapy students (77%; n = 20/26). There were 27 (n = 46) matched pairs of second year pharmacy...
Interprofessional debates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I will use the skills I learned in the future</th>
<th>All team members contributed equally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I felt comfortable with this teaching method</td>
<td>I developed critical thinking skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more willing to listen to conflicting perspectives</td>
<td>The debate topics were challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The debates make the module more interesting</td>
<td>The debates added to my understanding of ethical principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The debates are an appropriate teaching method for ethics</td>
<td>Debates are an appropriate teaching method for ethics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Graph showing student responses](https://example.com/graph.png)

The intervention was designed to initiate early IPE, with a balanced number of professions, appropriate to the stage of the curriculum. Students enjoyed the debates more than they expected to and found it of benefit to work as part of a team. The students were challenged into critical thinking and active learning. The interprofessional debates opened the students’ minds to conflicting views, which is particularly valuable in teaching ethics. We conclude from this study that interprofessional debates promoted a positive attitude to learning. We believe that structured debate is a useful tool for teaching ethics and professionalism in an interprofessional context.

**Declaration of interest**

The authors report no declarations of interest. The authors alone are responsible for the writing and content of this paper.

**References**


