

Abstract

CONNECTING OLDER ADULTS WITH STUDENTS THROUGH INTERPROFESSIONAL TELECARE (COAST-IT): A PROGRAM EVALUATION. Madison J Kim¹, Sarah E Tietz²,

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Purpose: By 2030, it is projected one in five people in the United States will be 65 years old and over; it is critical that future health care professionals are prepared to care for older adults. COAST-IT (Connecting Older Adults with Students Through Interprofessional Telecare) is a longitudinal program implemented across various health profession schools at an academic hospital system that focuses on providing health professional students the opportunity to improve communication skills and change attitudes towards older adults. **Methods:** Older adults were recruited and paired with students from pharmacy, nurse practitioner, dental, and medicine programs. Students made social phone calls every week to two weeks to their older adult partner (OAP). Students were surveyed before and after participating in the COAST-IT program about their attitudes towards older adult and self-perceived communication skills. The survey included perceptual questions and free text responses to assess knowledge, communication, and attitudes towards older adults. A chi-square test was utilized to evaluate for statistical significance between aggregate pre- and post- responses. **Results:** The questionnaire and free response data is collected before and after program participation on a semester long basis. As of November 2021, 373 students have participated and have responded to the survey. To date, the largest improvements have been seen in student self-perceived communication skills. Student's reported level of confidence with respect to talking to an older adult improved. The percentage of students who ranked their confidence level as "very confident" increased 18.73% and the percentage of students who ranked themselves as "not really confident" decreased from 7% to 0.5%. Stress while talking to an older adult was reduced from 18.38% to 10.67%. Students were also better able to define ageism and there was a 6.37% increase in students who picked the correct definition ($p < .045$). Data collection is ongoing on a semester basis. **Conclusions:** Caring for the growing older adult population will require interprofessional teams that have well-developed communication skills and knowledge of the challenges faced by older adults. Many geriatric focused curriculum interventions are not longitudinal programs. The COAST-IT program provides students a way to practice building longitudinal relationships that improve attitudes toward older adults as well as providing opportunities to build communication skills with real patients in their preclinical years. The initial surveys were primarily used for internal program evaluation; the program is currently progressing to the use of standardized, validated surveys to comprehensively evaluate its impact on ageism and the attitudes of future healthcare providers towards older adults. For future considerations, program evaluation can extend to evaluating the impact that COAST-IT has on the OAP regarding loneliness and perceived social isolation.