Collaboration in practice can help students learn how to collaborate at bedside

In June 2019, a group of Baptist College of Health Sciences from four different disciplines participated in a first-ever collaboration theatre using real-life patient scenarios to solve a problem. The collaboration theater is part of the interpersonal education initiative PULSE (professionals united in life, service and education) lead by Kira Anderson, Angel Boling, and Benjamin Roberts, faculty at the College.

Students in their junior and senior years in nursing, respiratory therapy, medical radiography and medical lab sciences participated in the exercise in addition to College alumni and faculty acting as patients. Professionals in these four disciplines are likely to work together in a hospital situation so that is why faculty decided to start with this group for the first collaboration.

The scenarios involved an in-patient change of status, such as mental change or breathing change. The scenarios are realistic to what the students will encounter in the real world. While diagnostics and patient assessment were important in this exercise, the critical component was team work and communication.

The students participated in the patient-care exercise and then spent significant time to debrief from the scenarios; what should they have done differently, who should have been the lead care giver in any certain situation, did they work well together or in silos?

“We want to better prepare students for a career where they collaborate well to help reduce medical errors and improve quality of care,” said Ben Roberts, a medical radiographer professor at the College. “Communications and collaboration are essential skills for the work force.”

Ultimately the College is working to build an interprofessional simulation center for students to learn how to interact with colleagues in different disciplines so they aren’t learning how to collaborate for the first time at the bedside following graduation.

“We recognize that collaboration practice is a real need,” added Roberts. “Students need to learn at the right time how to communicate with other health care professionals. A bad communications dynamic can create real problems in medicine.”

More than 60 people viewed the collaboration exercise. The faculty hope to hold a second collaboration theater again in the future.