Patients as partners in undergraduate allied health curriculum: How are they involved?

Cynthia Palmaria 1, Amanda Bolderston 1, Susan Fawcett 1

1. Radiation Therapy Program, Department of Oncology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, CAN

Corresponding author: Cynthia Palmaria, palmaria@ualberta.ca

Categories: Medical Education, Other

Keywords: service-user involvement, undergraduate curriculum, education curriculum, patient involvement, allied health education

Abstract

Purpose: Patient involvement in radiation therapy educational programs is thought to enhance student skill development. There is little research in the radiation therapy field in this area. This scoping review thus examined literature on the practices and benefits of integrating patients/service users in the wider field of allied health student education.

Materials: Electronic databases MEDLINE, EMBASE and CINAHL were searched for English-language articles on patient involvement in allied health educational programs. Date range was 2011 to present. Clinical placement educational activities were excluded.

Methods: A Microsoft Excel form was developed to extract data on (i) country of origin (ii) population and methods (iii) educational intervention type (iv) training for patients/service users and (v) key findings. Three reviewers independently screened and extracted relevant data. Any disagreement was discussed and resolved by consensus. Data was synthesized through a thematic narrative approach.

Results: The initial search yielded 93 articles. After review 24 were selected based on planned and active involvement of service users in the curriculum.

Allied health professions included respiratory therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language pathology and radiation therapists. The studies were mainly undergraduate (24) with one graduate program. Most research engaged patients in curriculum delivery (19) and student assessment (5). These collaborations emphasized positive outcomes on student skills development (20) and patient empowerment (2). While six articles recommended patient training and two role clarification, two specified more studies are needed. Finally, two papers suggested aftercare for students subsequent to patient interaction.

Conclusions: Evidence suggested collaboration between education programs and patients enhances student skills and improvement of healthcare delivery. Both patients and students shared insights on the benefits of patient integration into the students' learning experiences. The insights from this study will be used to further develop a survey that examines current global practice in radiation therapy programs.