

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Project Goals/Innovation:** Because health care practitioners are required to work in interprofessional teams, national health professions curriculum development documents call for training students in specific strategies for communicating with each other. Yet, interprofessional communication skills and strategies have not been a focus of the curricula of the Schools of Medicine, Pharmacy, or Nursing. It is this colleague-with-colleague communication that is addressed by this collaboration among the Schools of Pharmacy, Nursing, and Medicine. We will adapt the **standardized patient** teaching strategy (where an individual trained to act as a patient with specific symptoms, problems, emotions, and other factors impacting care portrays that role in a teaching situation with a health professions student) to develop new course materials in the form of three scenarios depicting colleague-with-colleague communication challenges. We will test a new methodology, **standardized colleagues**, a process that trains health professionals to portray a particular professional role, attitude, and communication style in a teaching situation with a student and to consistently respond to and give feedback on student behaviors.

**Description:** The objectives of the project are to:

1. Design and develop three scenarios, including scripts that represent authentic interprofessional interactions and communication challenges to facilitate the development of communication skills by pharmacy and nursing students.
2. Pilot test the scenarios with pharmacy and nursing students, with the role of the physician played by a trained standardized colleague, to determine clarity and utility for instruction; and refine scenario scripts based on pilot experience.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of the standardized colleague as a teaching strategy to facilitate the development of interprofessional communication skills.

**Potential Impact:** As a result of this project, we will have:

- Developed new course materials and tested an innovative instructional strategy to improve instruction and student development of interprofessional communication skills.
- Increased the number of interprofessional education opportunities across the schools of the health sciences.
- Developed the standardized colleague strategy for initial implementation in the schools of pharmacy and nursing. Based on the acceptance across programs of a similar strategy that uses standardized or simulated patients to teach communication skills, this innovative instructional strategy will be applicable in other health sciences schools within and outside of the University of Pittsburgh.

**Sustainability:** The project co-directors will use the results of this pilot to seek external funding to develop additional scenarios, to study more extensively the standardized colleague teaching method, and to compare the use of live standardized colleagues with virtual standardized colleagues. Developed scenarios and scripts and the standardized colleague strategy will be used in subsequent course offerings beyond the 2009-10 academic year, and continuing costs will be assumed by the participating schools. Additionally, developed scenarios will be adapted to include and “standardize” other health professionals.

**Evaluation:** Success of the project will be measured through:

- Pre-, immediately post, and 3- and 6-month follow-up evaluations of students’ perceived abilities to communicate effectively with physicians.
- Faculty and standardized colleague evaluation and feedback on demonstrated student behaviors impacting communication effectiveness.
- Survey of student perceptions of and satisfaction with the standardized colleague strategy.