

Changes in Professional and Community Perceptions Following Physical Therapy Graduate Student Participation in a Student Led Inter-professional Outreach Clinic

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Over the past six months, Indiana University physical therapy students have organized a student run clinic as part of a larger medical school led inter-professional outreach initiative. As participants in this initiative, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year students have engaged in patient care as well as inter-professional activities. The purpose of this study was to evaluate how student participation influenced their perceptions of professional and social responsibility. Professionalism within physical therapy encompasses multiple attributes that include clinical competency as well as professional and social responsibility. An open-ended questionnaire with reflection prompts was designed to capture student thoughts relative to these constructs. Data collection occurred following a four hour voluntary clinical commitment. Data evaluations were conducted by several researchers who independently reviewed the responses for common themes. The results indicate that students are having positive influential experiences that focus on three distinct areas: professional competency, professional responsibility, and civic identity. Student responses demonstrating professional responsibility included an appreciation for the importance of “treating the patient as a whole” as well as a desire to mentor future students in this setting. Professional responsibility was seen in comments made about the opportunity to apply what they had learned as well as “advocating for community wellness.” Students expressed surprise in learning about their potential impact in the community, which caused many to indicate a desire to be more civically engaged. These findings parallel the physical therapy profession’s core values of excellence, professional duty, and social responsibility. By using their current knowledge and promoting effective physical therapy services to those of different socioeconomic statuses, students are experiencing and developing the professional constructs required of their chosen field. Students also clearly expressed a desire to continue to serve this community supporting the importance of this inter-professional clinic as an opportunity to positively shape student professional development.

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