

Shared learning for all health and social care undergraduates and the development of interprofessional practice

**Dr Lesley Diack
School of Pharmacy
The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen**

Background and Rationale

In his foreword to *The Right Medicine*, Mr Bill Scott, the Chief Pharmaceutical officer for Scotland, stated that 'Whole system working and improving the patient's experience within and across clinical and organisational boundaries, sets a challenge to healthcare professionals.' The establishment of an ethos of cooperative working among the health care professionals must ultimately benefit patients. For this to be successful it has to start in the undergraduate teaching curriculum. Only then can the process become embedded in any health care system. 'Team work and cohesion are vital to the delivery of patient care,' *Designed to Care – renewing the NHS in Scotland* (1998) yet little has been achieved at undergraduate level to instil this into the future health and social care professionals. However much of the research would argue that 'the effectiveness of patient care will improve through collaboration and team work within and between health care teams' and that this belief 'is providing a focus internationally for 'shared learning' in health professional education'.¹ Scotland needs to take this forward in the next few years to be able to provide a well trained and cohesive health and social care profession.

Project summary

During 2003 the School of Pharmacy at The Robert Gordon University and the Medical School at the University of Aberdeen jointly applied for a grant to develop and facilitate shared learning at the undergraduate level between the two universities. The project was funded by a grant from NES for one year. It was, primarily, to be a pilot project.

In September 2003 the 'shared' research fellow, Dr Lesley Diack, began her research. A unique feature of this appointment was that the post holder was a joint research fellow with a position in each university, an office in each university and able to attend meetings at all levels at each university.

The aim of the pilot project was to develop and deliver a common shared learning programme for undergraduate professional qualifying courses in medicine (University of Aberdeen) and pharmacy (The Robert Gordon University). The development drew on the commonalities within these courses to promote common learning strategies. It was hoped that such an approach would serve to inculcate, at the undergraduate level, an awareness of the necessity for multi-professional team approach to health care issues. The pilot project was so successful that it has resulted in three years further funding from the Scottish Executive Health Department to take the project forward and embed it into the curricula at each University.

2004-05 Employability Quality Enhancement Theme Case Studies

It became apparent from the literature review in the first stages of the pilot project that there had been a number of other good initiatives over the last decade but that these had failed to implement any recommendations because of lack of continued funding, lack of dedicated staff and timetabling problems.ⁱⁱ The new SEHD three year project seeks to take the Grampian pilot forward to the implementation stage whilst continuing to develop and evaluate an extension of the shared learning curriculum to other health and social care professionals. This will serve to foster a team building approach at an early stage in their undergraduate training, making the graduates more employable and ready to face the challenges of a 21st century health service.

ⁱ Horsburgh M, Lamdin R, Williamson E. 'Multiprofessional learning: the attitudes of medical nursing and pharmacy students to shared learning,' *Medical Education*, 2001; 35: 876-883.

ⁱⁱ Zwarenstein M, Reeves S, Barr H, Hammick M, Koppel I, Atkins J. *Interprofessional education: effects on professional practice and health care outcomes* Cochrane Library, Issue 4, 2003 Chichester, John Wiley & Sons. Hammick M. 'Interprofessional education: evidence from the past to guide the future,' *Medical Teacher*, Vol. 22, No. 5, 2000.