

Halifax Outreach Prevention Education Support (HOPES) Student-Run Clinic: Bridging Community Health and Interprofessional Health Education

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Abstract

This commentary explores the Halifax Outreach Prevention Education Support (HOPES) clinic, an interprofessional student-run clinic in Halifax, Nova Scotia, which unites students from eight different health disciplines. HOPES provides essential health care services to underserved communities while offering students valuable training in interprofessional collaboration, communication, and cultural competence. By fostering teamwork across disciplines, HOPES aligns with interprofessional health education principles, allowing students to develop skills critical to addressing health disparities. Notable initiatives include a vaccine clinic run in partnership with the North End Community Health Centre, which enhances access to immunizations for underserved populations, and health promotion pop-up events focused on community engagement. These projects underscore HOPES's commitment to reducing health care inequities and promoting health literacy. By integrating diverse health professions, HOPES prepares students to become leaders in inclusive, patient-centred care, ultimately advancing health equity and well-being in the communities they serve.

Keywords: community health, student-led clinics, collaborative practice, practicum

Introduction

Interprofessional student-run clinics (SRCs) allow students to hone discipline-specific skills while simultaneously cultivating essential interprofessional competencies critical for future practice (Briggs & Fronek, 2020). Located in Halifax, Nova Scotia, the Halifax Outreach Prevention Education Support (HOPES) clinic is an interprofessional SRC encompassing eight health-based academic

programs from Dalhousie University and Mount Saint Vincent University. These programs include dental hygiene, dentistry, dietetics, health promotion, health administration, medicine, nursing, and pharmacy. The objectives of HOPES are twofold. First, the clinic aims to offer accessible and sustainable interprofessional health and social services to the community, focusing on underserved populations. Second, through participation in HOPES, students can develop and refine their interprofessional collaboration skills while positively impacting underserved communities' health.

Interprofessional Health Education and the Role of HOPES

Interprofessional Health Education (IPHE) equips students with the essential competencies—teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and collaboration—required to succeed in the health workforce. International health organizations and universities have embraced IPHE as part of a health care system revitalization to promote interprofessional teamwork, enhance patient care, and improve health outcomes (van Diggele et al., 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes that “Interprofessional education occurs when two or more professionals learn about, from, and with each other to enable effective collaboration and improve health outcomes” (WHO, 2010, p. 13). By bringing together students from different health professions, IPHE fosters insight, respect, and teamwork, leading to high-quality, patient-centred care—the foundation of effective health care.

HOPES serves as a hub for IPHE, offering students from the eight disciplines an opportunity to learn from one another in a socialized, professional context. Through peer teaching, students share knowledge from their respective fields, deepening their understanding of each profession's role and responsibilities. This exposure enhances their ability to communicate and collaborate effectively across disciplines. Additionally, assessment and feedback are integral to the IPHE experience at HOPES. Receiving feedback from peers in other disciplines promotes self-reflection, strengthens communication skills, and encourages appropriate professional language, fostering a holistic approach to health care. At HOPES, preceptors from each health profession guide students through challenges like interdisciplinary conflicts, helping them build team cohesion and develop problem-solving skills.

Facilitating interprofessional teams comes with challenges. A significant challenge in establishing HOPES involved navigating conflicting regulations between faculties and regulatory bodies. Balancing the diverse requirements of each profession proved difficult. Moreover, common barriers—such as communication issues, different professional cultures, traditional hierarchies, and role blurring—complicated teamwork. Despite these obstacles, the experience has helped students strengthen their collaborative skills and appreciate the unique contributions of each profession.

Impact on Underserved Populations

HOPES plays a crucial role in addressing health disparities within underserved communities by offering accessible health care services tailored to meet their unique needs. Involvement with HOPES highlights how privilege influences access to health care, as many individuals face systemic barriers such as language differences and socio-economic challenges. HOPES has had a meaningful impact on the individuals and communities it serves by fostering trust and providing culturally sensitive care. This approach enhances individual health outcomes and empowers communities by promoting health literacy and self-advocacy. The work at HOPES underscores the importance of cultural competence in health care, demonstrating that actively listening to and engaging with underserved populations is essential to understanding their perspectives. These insights reinforce the need for health care providers to adapt their practices to better serve the diverse needs of patients. By prioritizing cultural competence, a more equitable health care system can be created—

one that values and respects all individuals, ultimately leading to improved health outcomes and reduced disparities in care.

Looking at HOPES in the 2024–25 Academic Year

In Fall 2024, HOPES partnered with the North End Community Health Centre to allow students to participate in delivering their vaccine campaign. The vaccine campaign addresses health disparities within underserved communities by providing accessible immunization services to individuals facing barriers to traditional health care settings, including newcomers, low-income families, and racial minorities (Aylsworth et al., 2022). The significance of this work lies in its role in promoting health equity. Many underserved groups experience higher rates of preventable diseases due to limited access and availability of health care resources (Baah et al., 2019). By improving vaccine access, clinics can reduce long-standing health disparities in health care access and outcomes.

Nursing and medical students collaborate in the vaccine clinic to administer vaccines to North End Community Health Centre clients. This initiative aligns with IPHE objectives by fostering effective collaboration in a safe, supportive environment. Through this experience, students become better equipped to address the diverse needs of the populations they serve, promoting a coordinated and inclusive approach to health care. Efforts to vaccinate underserved communities are essential for achieving public health goals and reducing health disparities across different socio-economic groups. Overall, the vaccine clinic exemplifies HOPES's commitment to improving health outcomes and promoting equity in health care access.

Projects for HOPES in Winter 2025 have included pop-up events focused on health promotion. These events involve students from all eight health disciplines. The pop-up events feature booths at partnering organizations where clients can learn about various health promotion activities. For example, at interactive booths, dietetics students lead sessions on nutrition and healthy eating habits, while dental hygiene and dentistry students demonstrate proper oral care techniques and offer practical advice for maintaining oral health. Nursing and medicine students provide information on managing chronic conditions such as diabetes, including guidance on monitoring blood glucose levels and recognizing complications. Pharmacy students help clients navigate available resources and provide guidance on accessing the full range of services pharmacists can offer. Students from different disciplines also have the opportunity to observe each other's practice, gaining insight into their peers' roles and approaches to care. These booths serve to engage clients in personalized, informative discussions, empowering them to make informed health decisions. By engaging clients through accessible and informative pop-up events, HOPES aims to educate and empower individuals to take charge of their health, ultimately enhancing health literacy within the community.

Conclusion

HOPES is critical in reducing health inequities and delivering treatment to underserved populations. The SRC supports individuals in need and prepares aspiring health professionals for collaborative practice through its innovative approach to IPHE. Its various initiatives, such as the vaccination clinic and winter pop-up events, demonstrate how effective student-led efforts can improve public health. HOPES gives students invaluable competencies and insights that will influence their future professions in health care by promoting cultural competency and highlighting the significance of accessible health care.

At its core, HOPES is built on a holistic, interprofessional approach that integrates various health professions, including those often overlooked in conventional health care discussions. Guided by the principles of inclusion, HOPES provides dignified care to all community members and embraces various health professions, from physicians and nurses to dietetics and health

administration professionals. This collaborative model offers invaluable experience in interdisciplinary health care, fostering a deeper appreciation for patient-centred care and the importance of accessible health services. Through this experience, participants develop a passion for health care and gain clarity on how to become leaders who drive meaningful change and advocate for the well-being of underserved communities.

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