Implementation of a transitions of care elective course at a pharmacy school with branch sites

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Abstract

Background: The Center for Advancement of Pharmacy Education educational outcomes include an objective regarding managing patient's healthcare needs during transitions of care (TOC). Pharmacy school curriculums should be designed to teach student pharmacists to provide TOC services.   **Methods:** A TOC focused elective was implemented across three sites of a pharmacy school. The course involved lectures, interactive activities, flip-the-classroom activities, and group projects.   **Results:** A total of 51 students completed course evaluation surveys over two course offerings. Most students, 92.2% (n = 47), agreed or strongly agreed that the course objectives were met. Similarly, 96.1% (n = 49) agreed or strongly agreed that the course was well organised. **Conclusion:** An assessment of course evaluations demonstrated positive student perceptions of the course and successful course implementation. Schools of pharmacy should consider implementing a TOC focused elective to provide students with foundational knowledge for caring for patients throughout the continuum of care.

Introduction

The positive impact of clinical pharmacist involvement during transitions of care (TOC) has been well established in the literature. Studies have demonstrated reductions in readmissions, medication errors, and healthcare costs when pharmacists and supporting personnel provide TOC services (Stranges *et al.,* 2020). These services are provided in a variety of practice settings, including hospitals, ambulatory care clinics, and community pharmacies. Since pharmacists practising in all settings are involved in medication management during TOC, it is imperative that student pharmacists are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide TOC services. Student pharmacists commonly encounter TOC during experiential education; however, students experience different levels of emphasis based on the practice setting. Transitions of care concepts should be incorporated throughout the didactic coursework of professional programmes to ensure students develop foundational knowledge and skills related to TOC.

The Center for the Advancement of Pharmacy Education (CAPE) and the Entrustable Professional

Activities (EPAs) outlined by the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP), respectively highlight the importance of TOC related knowledge and skills through its incorporation as a learning objective, and as a necessary skill for a new graduate (Medina *et al.,* 2013; Haines *et al.,* 2017). Although it is an essential part of pharmacy education, incorporating TOC related concepts throughout the professional programme can be challenging. A survey of pharmacy practice chairs identified gaps in pharmacy school curriculums related to the teaching of TOC concepts and experiential opportunities (Eltaki *et al.,* 2018). Regarding the experiential curriculum, researchers determined that 44% of respondents did not and were not planning to hire TOC specific faculty in the near future. (Eltaki *et al.,* 2018). The most common reasons cited for this were insufficient structure at a practice site and opposition from institutional stakeholders (Eltaki et al., 2018). Regarding didactic curriculum, 86% of respondents incorporated TOC related concepts in their curriculum; however, only an average of four total curriculum hours were spent teaching TOC related concepts (Eltaki *et al.,* 2018). This content was commonly placed within pharmacotherapy classes and/or as skills lab exercises

(Eltaki *et al.,* 2018). Reasons for not incorporating TOC concepts in didactic coursework included unknown ideal placement, an already full curriculum, and opposition from faculty and administrators (Eltaki *et al.,* 2018). Eltaki and colleagues demonstrate the identified need for TOC focused content while identifying major barriers. Moreover, if institutions are unable to hire TOC specific faculty, it is difficult to teach and emphasise the importance of care across the continuum.

The author's school of pharmacy (SOP) prioritised the need for TOC specific faculty and paired with two institutions to develop clinical positions in TOC. However, the TOC specific faculty and administration identified a need for TOC focused content within the author's own curriculum. Upon review of the curriculum, it was determined that students learn skills necessary to provide TOC services, but opportunities to apply these to patients in the continuum of care are limited. Like Eltaki and colleagues., TOC concepts at our SOP were rooted in skills labs and limited to approximately three hours of content. At the author's SOP, students learn the necessary patient communication skills, medication history collection and medication education within the first year of the programme, but TOC concepts are not necessarily stressed. These skills are reinforced through subsequent skills labs and objective structured clinical examinations (OSCEs) but also lack incorporation of TOC concepts. It is not until the spring semester of the third year that students are introduced to TOC concepts when they complete a single medication reconciliation activity and participate in a one-hour lecture on how to develop and implement a pharmacy-led TOC service. To meet the identified gaps in the didactic curriculum regarding TOC focused skills and knowledge, two faculty members with clinical practice sites dedicated to TOC developed an elective course.

Descriptions of incorporating TOC concepts into pharmacy school didactic curriculums are limited. Sen and authors in 2016, described the development and implementation of a two-credit hour TOC elective course for 12 third year professional students at a single site college of pharmacy (Sen *et al.,* 2016). The course was intentionally offered to third year students to allow for the application of their therapeutic knowledge of common disease states seen in TOC (Sen *et al.,* 2016). The course involved active learning activities, site visits, an interprofessional education (IPE) workshop, the development of a new TOC practice model and a patient simulation (Sen *et al.,* 2016). The results of that study demonstrated student growth in TOC related concepts and students' perceived benefit from the course (Sen *et al.,* 2016). Challenges to implementing the elective included faculty workload

concerns if the class size increased, scheduling and organisation of events, and revision of the grading scheme (Sen *et al.,* 2016).

The faculty modelled the course design after the elective described by Sen and colleagues in 2016; however, numerous changes were made to meet the unique student and SOP needs while overcoming the challenges that they experienced. A major consideration for course design was the SOP, where this course was implemented and consisted of a total of three sites across the state. In accordance with programme accreditation standards, special attention was needed to ensure similar learning experiences on each campus. The author's school is accredited as one school with multiple sites, and therefore the professional degree programme is delivered synchronously to students on each campus with distance education technology. Despite the limited opportunities for site visits, IPE workshops, and patient simulations, as described by Sen and colleagues, these concepts were still incorporated through other activities (Sen *et al.,* 2016). Adaption of these activities overcame the challenges of workload and scheduling due to reduced coordination with practice sites or other healthcare professionals while ensuring that the necessary knowledge is taught and applied. Additionally, this course was intentionally designed for different levels of learners, second and third-year pharmacy students, by focusing on the TOC related skills and concepts instead of therapeutic knowledge. The course was offered in the spring semester as student pharmacists had already learned the necessary foundational patient care skills, and it is immediately before second year students complete their health system Introductory Pharmacy Practice Experience (IPPE) and third year students complete their first Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience (APPE). Allowing second- and third-year students to enrol in the course overcame the barrier of managing a larger class size. In all, the aim of this paper is to describe the development and implementation of an elective course for second-, and third-year professional students across three sites of a SOP focused on the concepts and skills needed for medication management during TOC, while overcoming challenges described in the literature regarding implementation a TOC related elective.

Description of course

The Guideline for Reporting Evidence-based practice Educational interventions and Teaching (GREET) checklist developed by Phillips and colleagues in 2016 was used to describe the development and implementation of an elective course for pharmacy students focused on concepts and skills related to

medication management in TOC (Phillips *et al.,* 2016). The course goal is to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively and safely manage medications across the continuum of care and successfully develop and implement pharmacy-led TOC services in their future pharmacy careers. The course map, including curricular outcomes, course objectives, learning activities and evaluation criteria, is outlined in Table I (Medina *et al.,* 2013; Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education, 2016).

Educational materials for the course consist of presentation slides, videos, and assigned reading documents. All the course materials were provided to students via the university learning management system. The course schedule and description of the weekly content is outlined in Table I (Medina *et al.,* 2013; Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education, 2016).

Table I: Course schedule, assignments mapped to curricular outcomes and course objectives (Medina *et al.,* 2013; ACPE, 2016).

Week	Topic/ content	Assignment	Course objectives	CAPE educational outcome
1	*Lecture:* Introduction to transitions of care (TOC), importance of TOC, negative outcomes of poor TOC, barriers/gaps to effective TOC, and benefits of improved TOC	*Homework:* Reflection on current knowledge of pharmacists' role in TOC and what they hope to gain from the course		
2	*Lecture:* Overview of pharmacist involvement in TOC and various practice settings	*Homework:* Pharmacist interview	Reflect on lessons learned about the patients' experience and the pharmacists' role during TOC	3.3.3
3	*Student presentations:* Small group delivery of information highlighting the assigned landmark trial	*In-class:* Reflection of the presented landmark trials	Review a landmark TOC article and identify current best practices, standards, regulatory policies, or guidelines related to medication management during TOC	2.2.6
			Demonstrate professionalism during class activities.	4.4.3
4	*Lecture:* Patient and Medication Safety as it relates to TOC	*Homework:* Worksheet applying lecture concepts	Discuss potential implications resulting from poor TOC as it relates to patients, healthcare facilities, and healthcare professionals.	3.1.4
			Evaluate risk factors for hospital readmission, medication errors, and poor outcomes during TOC	3.2.1
5	*TOC pharmacist panel:* Pharmacists practising TOC in various settings answer student questions about the pharmacists' role in TOC	*Homework:* Written reflection on how they will apply lessons learned in future practice	Reflect on lessons learned about the patients' experience and the pharmacists' role during TOC	3.3.3
			Demonstrate professionalism during class activities.	4.4.3
6	*Lecture:* High risk patient criteria & standards and regulations related to TOC			
7	*In-class activity:* Small group completion of clinical cases involving a patient experiencing a care transition		Given a patient case, apply TOC principles to meet patients' healthcare needs during TOC.	2.2.6
			Compare and contrast the role of pharmacists within different TOC settings and determine effective strategies for pharmacists to collaborate during TOC.	
			Given a case, identify potential barriers to effective TOC.	3.1.4

Week	Topic/ content	Assignment	Course objectives	CAPE educational outcome
			Evaluate risk factors for hospital readmission, medication errors, and poor outcomes during TOC.	3.2.1
			Classify high-risk criteria to identify patients in need of pharmacist-led TOC services to prioritise workload and deliver services to high-risk patients.	
8	*Student presentations*: Small group delivery of information highlighting review of a national organisation offering TOC resources/guidance	*In-class:* Reflection of national organisations presented	Demonstrate professionalism during class activities.	4.4.3
9	*Work session*: Groups collectively work on a longitudinal assignment of developing a TOC tool	*In-class:* Progress worksheet describing tools and plans to complete		
10	*Lecture:* Gathering medication histories and performing medication reconciliation			
11	*Lecture:* Providing patient education during TOC			
12	*In-class activity*: Complete medication reconciliation and role-play a patient education encounter during TOC	*Homework:* Documentation of medication reconciliation findings and patient education	Effectively obtain accurate and complete medication histories via patient interview.	3.6.1
			Through in-class role playgroup activities, effectively deliver discharge counselling on a new medication regimen.	3.6.4
			Demonstrate effective communication skills and therapeutic knowledge to identify and resolve medication-related issues during TOC.	3.6.4 3.6.9
13	*In-class activity:* Game-based review of TOC concepts			
14	*Lecture:* How to develop and implement pharmacy-led TOC services			
15	*In-class activity:* Patient Simulation - Perform select pharmacy-led TOC services with simulated patient encounters	*Homework:* Complete assigned pre – and post class work	Give a patient case and determine patient care needs during TOC and apply guideline-driven strategies to enhance the TOC process.	3.3.2
			Apply methods to effectively collaborate with other members of the healthcare team to ensure efficient and cost-effective care throughout the TOC process.	3.3.3
			Apply legal and ethical principles to patient care activities.	4.4.3
			Illustrate compassion through the delivery of patient-centred care.	
Finals	*Student presentations:* Presentation of group project developing TOC tool		Create a plan to develop and implement an innovative approach using evidence-based strategies to enhance pharmacy-led TOC services.	4.3.2
			Demonstrate professionalism during class activities.	4.4.3

Two faculty members developed the course and served as co-coordinators for the course. They are clinical assistant professors at the SOP and have clinical practice sites focused on transitions of care. They both completed teaching certificate programmes and post-graduate pharmacy practice residencies where they were trained in a variety of pharmacy practice areas, including TOC. The co-coordinators evenly divide the workload of the teaching efforts, including developing content, delivering lectures, facilitating in-class activities, and grading assessments.

The course is delivered in university classrooms at a SOP that consists of three sites. The course is traditionally delivered face-to-face and connected to all sites via live synchronous distant learning technology where distant sites interact with the instructor in real-time on a large screen in their classroom.

The course is offered to student pharmacists in their second and third professional year. The maximum enrollment capacity for the course is 30 students. The class meets for 50 minutes weekly for 16 weeks throughout the spring semester. The course attendance policy, as outlined in the syllabus, states weekly class attendance is expected and required. Strategies used to facilitate attendance include points associated with in-class activities. The students are responsible for self-directed learning outside of class to complete assignments and work on group projects. Students earn one credit hour toward their elective course requirements by completing this course.

The course is designed to alternate between didactic lectures and in-class active learning activities each week. Educational strategies include lectures, flip-the-classroom activities, role-play activities, group presentations, clinical vignettes, longitudinal projects, and a capstone patient simulation. Many of the active learning activities are completed in small groups. Prior to the start of the semester, the students are assigned to groups equal in size and consist of a fair representation of students from different years of the programme. Students remain in the same assigned groups for all group activities throughout the semester.

Course activities

The course consists of in-class activities, homework assignments, and group projects. The students are assessed by a faculty-developed rubric specific to each activity. A few of the unique learning activities are detailed below. A list of other learning activities is found in Table I (Medina *et al.,* 2013; Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education, 2016).

Pharmacist interview assignment

The pharmacist interview assignment occurs early in the course and requires students to reach out to a practising pharmacist and discuss their role in TOC. The goal of this activity is for students to gain a greater understanding of pharmacist involvement in TOC regardless of the job title or practice setting. The pharmacist can be a supervisor or coworker at their workplace, a professor, or a pharmacist mentor. The students are provided with a worksheet of pre-determined questions to ask the pharmacist. Topics of questions include barriers seen in providing TOC services, how to overcome barriers, areas for continuous quality improvement and advice for a pharmacist starting TOC services. Students provide a summary of the pharmacist's responses which are then evaluated using a rubric. By networking with pharmacists and exposing them to unique aspects of pharmacy involvement in TOC, this activity encourages students to be open-minded and innovative with regard to incorporating pharmacy-led TOC services in their future pharmacy practices.

Pharmacist panel session

One class session is dedicated to students learning from pharmacists practising TOC within their community in the form of a pharmacist panel. The panel is comprised of pharmacists who practice in a variety of settings such as academia, community, hospital, or ambulatory care to expose students to different TOC practice models. The aim of this activity is to have pharmacist participation at all three SOP sites. The students develop questions for the pharmacist panel prior to the session, and these questions are shared with the pharmacists ahead of time to guide them on what information the students would like to learn. This ensures the students' needs are met and increases student engagement. After the pharmacist panel session, the students complete a reflection assignment where they discuss the key takeaway points learned and describe how they will apply these lessons learned to their future pharmacy practice.

Clinical vignette cases

One of the interactive class sessions is dedicated to clinical vignette cases. The goal of this activity is for students to assess real patient cases and apply the knowledge they have gained throughout the semester regarding safe and effective medication management in TOC. The cases involve high-risk patients transitioning between different healthcare settings where a gap in TOC has occurred that led to a negative outcome. There are three separate cases, and each case occurs in a different setting (i.e. community pharmacy, ambulatory care clinic, acute care facility).

The students work in small groups to review the case and complete a worksheet identifying the high-risk patient criteria, gaps in TOC, and negative outcomes. The small groups develop a plan to address TOC related issues by describing each interprofessional team members' roles and responsibilities, pharmacist interventions, and communication between pharmacists in other practice settings. Once the case review is completed, the students share their answers with the class, and the faculty facilitate class discussion.

Capstone patient simulation

The capstone patient simulation involves one patient moving throughout the continuum of care. The goal is to assess the students' comprehensive skill set and application of medication management strategies in TOC. There were challenges to developing a patient simulation suitable for distant learning involving three campuses. One challenge was the co-coordinators could not be present on all three campuses to assess individual student performance. Another challenge was the time constraint, as all students needed to complete the activity in the 50-minute class session. To overcome these challenges, the co-coordinators developed a unique patient simulation using a multi-modal approach to fit the needs of the course. Prior to the patient simulation, students complete a homework assignment requiring them to submit questions they would ask a patient to gather a thorough and accurate medication history. The first portion of the in-class patient simulation involves the students listening to a recording of a pharmacist performing a medication history interview with a patient. The students are instructed to record the best possible medication list gathered during the interview recording. Then, students take a quiz and answer questions regarding the medication history. The last part of the patient simulation involves the students reviewing an after-visit summary that a patient received upon hospital discharge and performing a medication reconciliation between the admission and discharge medication list. Then, students completed short answer questions regarding identified medication errors and discrepancies as well as adherence and cost concerns. Students are also required to describe the patient counselling points that they would educate the patient on and develop a plan to collaborate with other interdisciplinary team members to resolve the concerns they identified.

TOC tool development project

The TOC tool development project is a longitudinal group project. The project involves students creating a tool to utilise during TOC to assist patients and/or healthcare professionals in achieving a safe and effective transition. Students are introduced to the requirements of this project and the associated grading rubric on the first day of class. Students are expected to work with their groups outside of class throughout the semester to complete the project. There is one class session in the middle of the semester, designated as a group workshop to allow students to work together on the project. At the end of the group workshop session, they submit a progress worksheet, which describes their project and outlines their plans to complete the project. This assignment is designed to keep them on track to complete the longitudinal project by the end of the semester. At the end of the semester, the group presents their work to the class. Each group learns about the other groups' innovative TOC tools and leaves the session with ideas to incorporate into their future pharmacy practice.

Evaluation

The incorporation of a TOC elective course allows students to learn the skills and knowledge necessary to provide TOC related services. The success of the course and students' perceived benefit is demonstrated thorough review of course evaluations. At the end of each semester, students are required to complete course and faculty evaluations anonymously for each required and elective course. Although response rates typically approach 100%, students can finish the survey without providing feedback for each question. Course evaluations are conducted as part of the programmatic assessment for the school and are standardised for all courses. Course evaluations are comprised of four five-point Likert-type items and three open response questions (Table II). The five-point Likert-type items require students to rate their level of agreement with statements ranging from 5 = "strongly agree", 4 = "agree", 3 = "neither agree nor disagree", 2 = "disagree", and 1 = "strongly disagree." Even though all course evaluation questions are necessary for course improvement, questions regarding the achievement of course objectives and course organisation are important to the assessment of overall course efficacy. This project was determined to be a quality improvement project by the Institutional Review Board and did not require review.

Table II: Course evaluation survey

5 – point scale questions	I believe the course objectives were met.
	The coordinator was available and effectively responded to student concerns.
	The course was well organised by the coordinator.
	The examinations were well–managed
Free-response questions	Describe any revisions or changes that can be useful in the course
	What parts of the course were most useful?
	What parts of the course were least useful?

Table III: Results for pertinent five-point course evaluation questions

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I believe the course objectives were met (n = 51)	33	14	4	0	0
The course was well organised by the coordinator (n = 51)	36	13	2	0	0

A maximum of 60 students could take the course in the two-course offerings. A total of 54 students enrolled in the course, of which 52 submitted the course evaluation surveys, but one survey was submitted with no responses leaving a total of 51 completed surveys (51/54 = 94.4% response rate). An overwhelming majority of students, 92.2% (n = 47), agreed or strongly agreed that the objectives of the course were met. Similarly, 96.1% (n = 49) agreed or strongly agreed that the course was well organised. In reviewing the open comments from students, several themes emerged regarding recommended areas of course improvement and the most beneficial aspects of the course. Students felt improvements could be made to address the redundancy of content and timing of activities. The most identified benefits of the course included the introduction and discussion of TOC focused ideas and the opportunity to apply these concepts during in-class activities. Students appreciated the variety of learning activities, including small group activities, traditional lectures, and peer-to-peer learning. They also mentioned that they enjoyed learning from pharmacists practising in the field because it exposed them to real-world examples and a passion for TOC. Finally, students noted exposure to practical resources to utilise in their future careers as a useful tool. Student viewpoints regarding group presentations varied as it was cited as an area for improvement and one of the most beneficial portions of the course. Students also commented that they believed the course should be offered to first-year students.

Discussion

The incorporation of an elective course focused on medication management in TOC was successfully implemented across three sites. It introduced second- and third-year students to new content related to TOC concepts and reinforced the knowledge and skills required to provide patient-centred care throughout the continuum of care. The evaluation data demonstrated that students felt course objectives were achieved and that the course was well organised. Students also identified that the course allowed them to explore future career opportunities.

Following two iterations of the TOC elective, the course coordinators have identified successful activities and challenges to overcome. Activities that have been positively received by students are the pharmacist interview assignment, pharmacists' panel, landmark trial review and a capstone project. After each course offering, the course coordinators have adjusted assignments to improve timing based on student feedback. Regarding redundancy of information, the course coordinators believe the organisation of concept introduction via lecture followed by in-class activities helps to reinforce skills by allowing students to apply the knowledge learned in lecture to a simulated patient care activity. This course design will continue, but duplicate information will be eliminated where appropriate. A primary challenge of the course has been developing content applicable for all levels of learners, as third year students have more therapeutic knowledge than second year students. To address this challenge, coordinators have carefully developed activities focused on TOC concepts and not therapeutic

knowledge. For example, learning activities focused on TOC concepts are related to disease states rather than treatment of those disease states. Moreover, when developing activities with medications, top drugs are utilised, and students can use drug information resources. Additionally, student groups are intentionally designed to have a similar mix of second- and third-year students in each group. The co-coordinators believe the course is appropriate for second- and third-year students and will not extend the course offering to first year students because they do not learn the foundational skills regarding medication history collection and medication education until the spring semester of their first year. Lastly, based on student feedback regarding the three group presentations, a method to assess students' contribution to the group projects will be explored.

Future plans

A future step to modify the course will be to map each course activity to the Pharmacists' Patient Care Process (PPCP) (Joint Commission of Pharmacy Practitioners, 2014). Aligning all course activities with the PPCP will help ensure student pharmacists are mastering all skills necessary for their future pharmacy practice in TOC. Another future step will be to consider transitioning this course from an elective course to a required course since the content is applicable to all pharmacy practice settings and helps student pharmacists become practice-ready. If this is not feasible, incorporation of TOC-focused activities into required courses within the didactic curriculum will be explored. In addition, the maximum enrollment capacity may be increased to allow more students to complete the course. This would require exploring the possibility of having local facilitators at each campus to assist with in-class activities.

The evaluation of this learning activity demonstrates a TOC elective course was successfully implemented across three sites, and students' perceptions of the course were positive. Based on this evaluation, SOPs are encouraged to assess their didactic curriculum and explore opportunities to incorporate TOC related concepts into required or elective coursework.

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