

An Examination of Social Work Involvement in Pain Curriculum Symposium - An Interprofessional Education Initiative

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BACKGROUND

- **Pain** is a **key area** of practice for social workers (SW) in health care
- Interprofessional education (IPE) provides SW students an opportunity to broaden their understanding about pain in an interdisciplinary setting
- The 3-day interfaculty pain curriculum (IPC) at U of T is an internationally regarded IPE event that included social work students for the **first time** in 2022
- *This qualitative study aims to understand SW students' perceptions of the benefits/challenges of participating in an interprofessional pain curriculum.*

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are social work students' perceptions of participating in the University of Toronto's pain curriculum program?
2. Should social work continue to participate in the IPC?

METHODOLOGY

- **Study Design:** descriptive qualitative research using purposive sampling
- **Study Settings:** online IPE – given the COVID-19 pandemic – including students from dentistry, medicine, nursing, occupational therapy PT, nursing, social work, occupational therapy, physical therapy, physician assistant programs
- **Sample Population:** Second-year and advanced-standing Master's of Social Work (MSW) students from the University of Toronto
- **Focus Groups:** Qualitative, semi-structured focus groups explored how social work students experienced the 3-day IPC

FOCUS GROUP DEMOGRAPHICS (N = 14)

- **N = 14 respondents**, from N = 143 eligible MSW students

Social Work Program Stream	# (%)
Health & Mental Health	13 (93%)
Children & their Families	1 (7%)

- **Four** focus groups were conducted between May 2022 and June 2022
 - **Two** focus groups had n = 4 participants each and **Two** focus groups had n = 3 participants each

FOCUS GROUP THEMES:

Benefits and Challenges of IPC Participation

Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning new knowledge about pain • applying social work knowledge and skills • gaining confidence in the value of social work contributions to care • exposing other disciplines to social work • collaborating with other disciplines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning biomedical content • inadequate social work specific content • encountering difficulties with interprofessional collaboration • educating other disciplines about role being difficult for social work students

FOCUS GROUP THEMES:

Benefits of IPC Participation

"There were these hyper-focused disciplines, and **social work had this ability to kind of like fill in the space in between** those well" (FG2, P4).

"It's a **good opportunity to educate other students and trainees** on the potentially valuable role of social work in pain management" (FG4,P3).

"It was **great to see how all the disciplines got introduced to the social determinants of health**, and how that plays in to pain." (FG1,P4).

"**What we learn now** - just not just social workers, but in other professions, **translates into how we respect each other**" (FG2, P2).



FOCUS GROUP THEMES:

Challenges of IPC Participation

"There was time **I felt like I didn't belong** - they would start **talking about medications and I had no idea** what they were talking about" (FG3, P3).

"I felt like **I was doing like a lot of educating ...I wasn't able to really learn** so much about pain, because I was having to educate people." (FG2,P3).

"In the Pain Curriculum, the **doctors often feel like they have more of a say** [in] what we should be doing" (FG2, P1).



FOCUS GROUP THEMES:

Student Recommendations on Social Work Participation

- Participants uniformly recommended that future social work (SW) students participate in the IPC.
 - "Social work should definitely still participate. I do think **it's important for us to be there to represent social work in an interprofessional team**" (FG4, P2)
- Some highlighted that participation maximally benefited a **subpopulation** of SW students
 - "It seemed like it was **mostly for those who work in acute care**" (FG3, P4)
- Some offered caveats for their endorsement.
 - "[SW should participate], but **I think there are a lot of caveats...the curriculum did a poor job at understanding social work perspective in pain, [and] there should be less emphasis on each profession educating other professions** about what we all do" (FG3, P1).

Next Steps

- Participation in pain curricula is **recommended** by SW students
- IPC provide opportunities for SW students to learn about pain and apply SW skills.
- Contributing to interprofessional education (IPE) events requires SW students able to articulate SW values, concepts, and contributions to pain treatment/management in an interprofessional context.
- SW educators are well-positioned to provide trainees with these skills and doing so will benefit future IPE events.

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