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SHARED DECISION-MAKING AS EXPERIENCED BY REHABILITATION STUDENTS ON AN INTERNATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING TRIP: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

The value of service-learning has been well documented in medical and allied health education (Abedini, Gruppen, Kolars, & Kumagai, 2012; Ekelman, Dal Bello-Haas, Bazyk, & Bazyk, 2003; Pechak, Gonzalez, Summers, & Capshaw, 2013; Pechak & Thompson, 2009; Ryan-Krause, 2016). Several studies have been conducted looking at cultural experiences and clinical reasoning (Corbett & Fickert, 2009; Sheppard & Landry, 2015; Nouvet, Chan & Schwartz, 2016). What has not been well-examined though is the concept of shared decision-making by those engaged in service-learning. The purpose of this phenomenological investigation (i.e. study) was to identify how occupational therapy (OT) and physical therapy (PT) students defined shared decision-making in the context of an international service-learning trip to Guatemala City, Guatemala in April 2017.

STUDY AIMS

1. Unearth the inter-professional service-learning experiences of OT and PT students.
2. Define the concept of shared decision-making in the context of international service-learning in Guatemala City, Guatemala.
3. Identify and document the influence of shared decision-making on the continuity of care for clients in an underserved and impoverished community.

The researchers predicted that how students experience, define, and describe shared decision-making based on the assigned service-learning project may change day-to-day. These changes may be due in part to their daily assignments, and defined roles within those assignments or projects; in short, team dynamics may also influence the shared decision-making experience, as well.



METHODS

The methodology used in this investigation is best aligned to the work of Moustakas (Moustakas, 1994). **First**, a heterogeneous group was identified and based upon demographics. **Second**, a philosophical discussion occurred among the participants and the researchers to refuse the subjective-objective perspective and therefore conclude that this type of research has both a quantitative as well as qualitative component. **Third**, the two onsite researchers bracketed themselves by discussing personal experiences with the phenomenon both prior to the week as well as during the week. **Fourth**, end-of-the-day group discussions and any individual reporting (if needed), or smaller group one-on-one debriefings, led to the data or transcribed group discussions. **Fifth**, data analysis followed a systematic process with member checking occurring in two-steps: between Researcher One and Two, and then between Two and Three. **Finally**, another checking occurred between Researcher One, Two, and Three to make-meaning and uncover the final emergent themes.

RESULTS

Several themes emerged through the multi-step methodology used to make-meaning of the service-learning experience. These themes included: resources, process, team, flexibility, implementation, and meaning-making. Students also used the following words to explain their shared decision-making experience: *collaborate*, *piggy-back*, *communicate*, *bounce ideas off one another*, *bring and draw upon in past experiences*, and *work together*.

DISCUSSION

Students who participated in this project defined shared decision-making through a collective experience. They described their processes too as collaborative and developed a strong appreciation for the benefits of working with a team. In addition, students demonstrated an understanding of how the team contributed to the outcomes of the projects as well as the continuity of care for their clients in the community.

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