



Incorporating Student-Run Psychology Services in a Physical Therapy Student-Run Pro Bono Clinic

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Abstract

The student-run pro bono physical therapy clinic is quickly gaining popularity as a model of hands-on student learning. Combining this model with other healthcare disciplines provides not only improved services to clients but also expanded learning opportunities within the realm of interprofessional education. There is little known about the potential benefit of adding psychology services to a pro bono physical therapy clinic setting. The purpose of this brief communication is to describe the integration of graduate clinical psychologist student services into a physical therapy student-run pro bono clinic and the benefits resulting from such integration from both a client service and student learning perspective.

Introduction

In Darnell's nationwide survey of free medical clinics, the author identified psychologists among the volunteer professionals listed in 15% of the 711 clinics surveyed.¹ In a survey of 86 student-run medical free clinics conducted by Smith et al., social workers were listed as interprofessional partners but psychologists were not.² There is little known about the potential benefit of psychology services within free clinics or student-run free clinics. The purpose of this communication brief is to describe the integration of graduate clinical psychologist student services into a physical therapy student-run pro bono clinic.

The Chester Community Physical Therapy Clinic is a student-run pro bono clinic serving the physical therapy needs of uninsured and underinsured community members since 2009.³ A Student Board consisting of 14 members from each Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) classes at Widener University run all the administrative aspects of the clinic, and all of the DPT students provide care in the clinic, under the supervision of volunteer licensed physical therapists.³ In 2016, a faculty member in the Institute for Graduate Clinical Psychology at Widener posed placing a graduate psychology intern into the clinic to address client needs. A pilot was conducted in the 2016-2017 academic year and was deemed to be successful by the outcome data and qualitative comments of all constituents. This led to the placement of two graduate clinical

psychology students to serve in the 2017-2018 academic year. This brief communication will provide an example of how clinical psychology services were integrated into an outpatient, student-run physical therapy clinic. We will discuss the elements that have facilitated this collaboration and describe the integration of the physical and mental health services.

The Incorporation of Clinical Psychology Students into Grand Rounds

Grand Rounds describes a curricular innovation that was developed by physical therapy student leaders to improve continuity of care.⁴ Small groups (teams) of students take “ownership” of specific clients with an average of 12 students per class cohort on a team.⁵ These groups meet biweekly to discuss progression of client care, which has improved continuity of care among many other things. Although the students run the meetings, faculty presence helps to shape the discussion with guiding questions and commentary that can only come from the perspective of a seasoned clinician. The result is a rich discussion where students learn to communicate at a professional level, infuse didactic learning with the complexities of actual clients, and exercise clinical reasoning during the formation of plans of care.

With the incorporation of clinical psychology students into Grand Rounds, the learning experience expanded to enhance interprofessional communication and learning. Discussions in this new setting were able to be shaped in many novel ways. The presentation of client cases (called “the client snapshot”) were transformed with verbiage to address this broader audience.⁴ The students’ awareness of the client experience was greatly enriched because of the increased focus on the behavioral component of client management. Sample PT student reflections are included in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Sample Quotes from PT Student Reflections on Grand Rounds

- 1 *“We started to talk about how our patient could benefit from a psychology evaluation due to her avoidance behavior which is caused by her pain. This was a good way to show interprofessional communication between us and the psychology students.”*
- 2 *“Overall, I think grand rounds has truly progressed, and there is something to be said for our client care in collaborating with and having access to the occupational therapy students and the psychology student on a regular basis.”*
- 3 *“We have a luxury at the clinic in that psychology can help address the issue with lack of motivation, but it is important for the PTIs and 2s to sit in on psychology sessions with a patient so they are able to take away some strategies.”*
- 4 *“As a group, we decided that the psychology students might be beneficial for this patient’s lack of motivation and desire to move. There was agreement from the PT clinical supervisor and the psychology student that we would begin suggesting this route for the patient. This was a great example for everyone in our group to see when we should refer out and what flags the patient had that supported that decision.”*

Discussion of pain neuroscience and the influence of client-clinician interaction became infused into the conversation. And, most importantly, the team learned how to improve overall client care by recognizing how to work together and maximize the use of each other’s expertise.

The Incorporation of Clinical Psychology Services into the Clinic

The role of clinical psychology students in the physical therapy clinic is founded on the idea of interprofessional collaboration. Together, clinical psychology, physical therapy, and occupational therapy students work together to gain a deeper understanding of the clients' function and quality of life, understanding that physical and mental health are deeply intertwined. Within the clinic, the clinical psychology students provide brief anxiety, depression, and pain assessments to each incoming client. With these results, in conjunction with talking to the physical and occupational therapy students, the clinical psychology students gain a better understanding of clients’ needs and their possible need for intervention.

In addition to screening patients, the clinical psychology students provide both psychological treatment and outpatient psychotherapy sessions. These services help manage psychological factors that may be impeding a client’s ability to adhere to their prescribed rehabilitative programs. The result is a collaborative treatment approach unique to each client’s particular needs. The integrated treatment program not only provides more comprehensive care but also becomes a vehicle for witnessing and better understanding the interventions discussed during Grand Rounds.

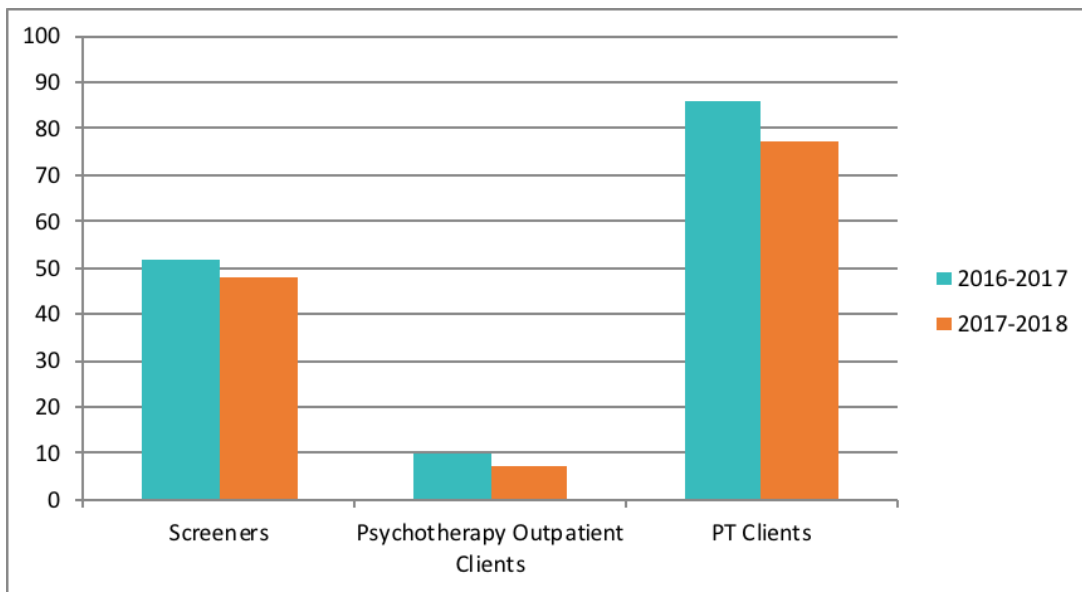


Figure 1. Frequency of Clinical Psychology Services Years 2016-2017 and 2017-2018.

From September 2016 through May 2017, the clinical psychology student piloting the program processed screeners with 52 clients after their initial PT or OT evaluation. He provided 75 in

vivo interventions and serviced 10 clients with outpatient psychotherapy sessions once a week. In comparison, the physical therapy students saw 86 new clients and delivered a total of 1186 client visits.

From September 2017 through May 2018, two clinical psychology students gave and scored 48 screening assessments after the initial PT or OT intake appointment. In addition, they regularly checked in with 29 clients over the course of their PT or OT treatment, typically more than once but the exact frequency count is unknown. Finally, seven clients were seen by the clinical psychology student once a week for regular outpatient psychotherapy. The total number of new physical therapy clients for all services provided during this year was 77 with a total of 1203 client visits.

The interprofessional collaboration between physical therapy and psychology in the student-run pro bono clinic has provided a wonderful opportunity for student clinician growth. Clinical psychology students were exposed to a variety of diagnoses novel to their typical curricula and were able to see the benefits of physical rehabilitative services. For them, this experience provided a valuable opportunity to see how physical limitations could directly impact a client's mental health. Conversely, it provided the physical therapy and occupational therapy students the opportunity to consider and experience the complexities and client challenges that reach well beyond their physical limitations. The groundwork has been laid and plans for continuing this interprofessional service learning experience are ongoing.

The Grand Rounds format provided the students from all involved disciplines with opportunities to speak with confidence to large groups by providing education to healthcare professionals outside of their discipline. Students learning each of their disciplines simultaneously in a parallel client environment fostered a culture of learning, growth and collaboration. Ultimately, clients benefitted from more comprehensive services as well as coordination of needed healthcare services. Although this brief communication is of one case where psychology services were added to a student-run pro bono physical therapy clinic, it provides an initial narrative of a successful and unique collaboration to provide interprofessional education training for multiple healthcare disciplines. Interprofessional education has been targeted as an important component of today's changing healthcare environment.⁶ This report lays that groundwork for one way that a student-run pro bono clinic can intertwine physical and mental health services into an interprofessional student learning experience.

References

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