

Developing Effective Interdisciplinary Team Praxis in Refugee Health: Findings from a Pilot Course at UNC - Chapel Hill

Adrianna Warner¹ ; Rachel Reiss² ; Ariel Hwang³

1- University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health, Chapel Hill, NC; 2,3,- University of North Carolina School of Medicine, Chapel Hill, NC

Objective

To identify and provide insight into effective strategies, challenges, and recommendations for future interdisciplinary teamwork and education endeavors for the common goal of supporting the health and well-being of refugees resettled in North Carolina.

Background

Challenges of Refugee Resettlement

- North Carolina is one of the top refugee-accepting states in the country.¹
- Refugees often lack health care over years of transition, and face barriers to health care and social services once resettled.

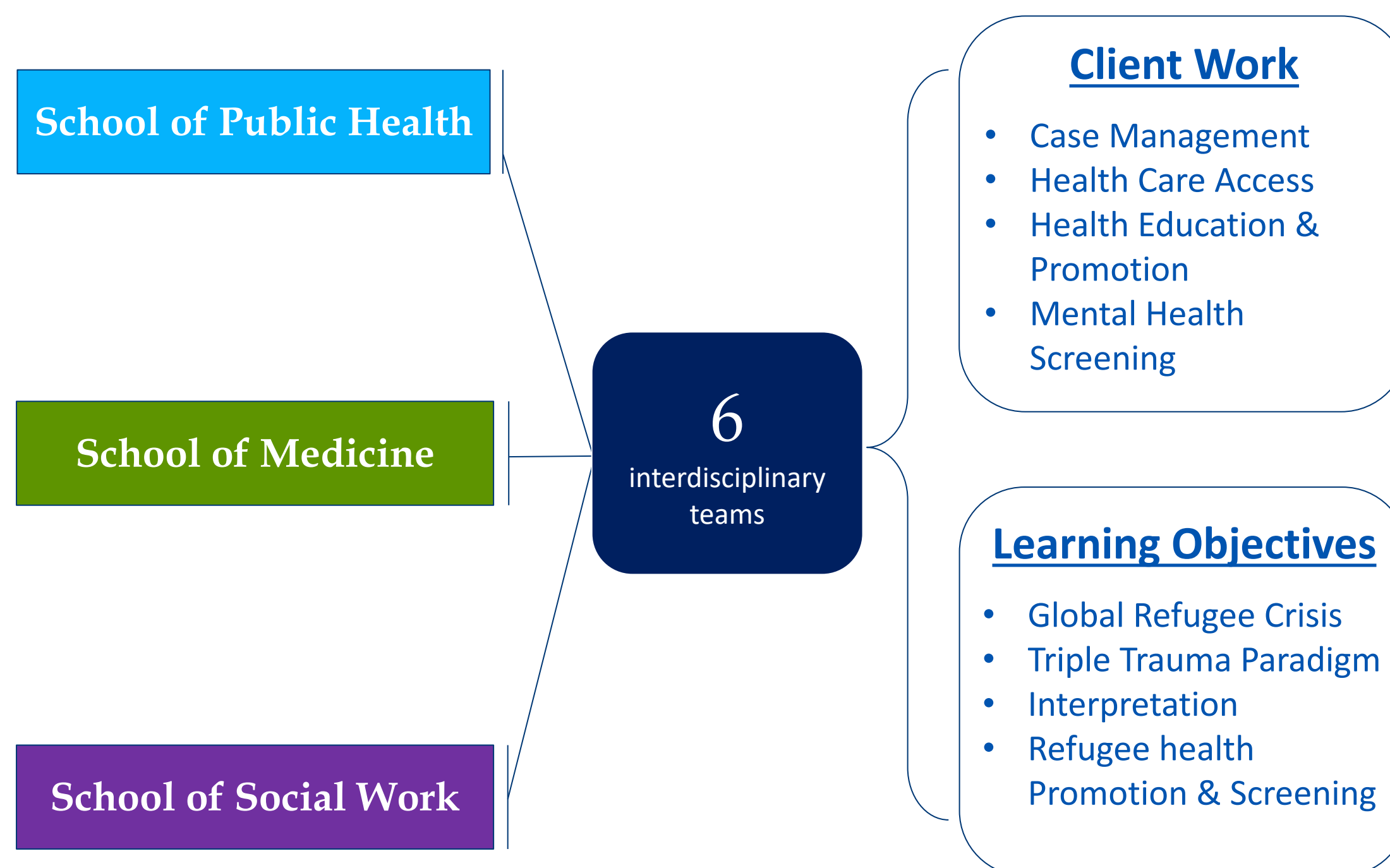
An Interdisciplinary Approach to Refugee Health

- Providing refugee clients with optimal care requires collaboration from many sectors of health care, policy, and social services.
- Professional training often isolates students from learning how to work in teams and understanding the values, roles and cultures of other disciplines.

Teaching Interdisciplinary Practice

- Providers need training to navigate discipline-specific differences to communicate and work effectively on behalf of resettled refugees.
- We report findings from interviews with students from the interdisciplinary pilot course on challenges and strategies for learning interdisciplinary practice.

Course Structure



Methods

We conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with ten students from the schools of Social Work, Public Health, and Medicine at UNC-Chapel Hill who participated in the pilot course. Participants were recruited in-person for a 45-minute interview, and asked to discuss their experiences working with their refugee clients in interdisciplinary units. The institutional review board of UNC-Chapel Hill approved this research.

Analysis

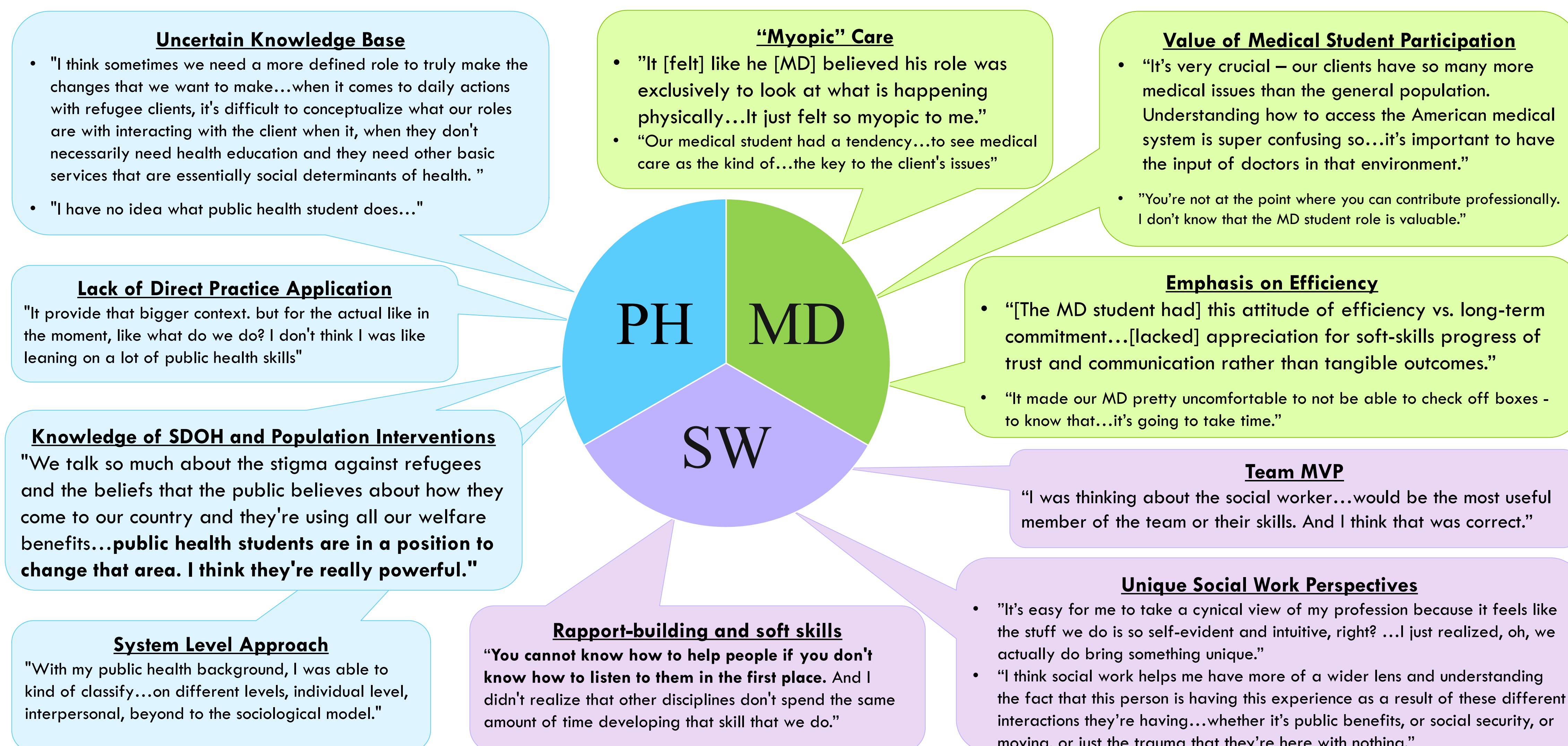
Interviews were recorded, anonymized, and transcribed, with only school of enrollment of each participant recorded. Each interview was analyzed for themes by at least two study members using MAXQDA 2018. Our objective was to examine: 1) understanding of disciplinary roles, 2) perspectives on team goals and function, and 3) effective strategies to harness interdisciplinary strength to support resettled refugees.

We are trained as cowboys, but then expected to work in pit crews. –Atul Gawande²

Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Value and Barriers



Disciplinary Themes



Conclusions

- This **hands-on** experience working with refugee populations **alongside different disciplines**:
- Demonstrated the **summation** of skills, knowledge, and human capital allowing interdisciplinary teams to address the **complex needs** of refugee populations.
 - Expanded understandings** of SDOH, refugee specific factors and importance of building relationships in such work.
 - Identified team **structures and norms** which facilitated or inhibited cohesion and perceived effectiveness:

Helpful	Hurtful
<ul style="list-style-type: none">'Soft Skills' → interpersonal relationship development & motivational interviewsIndividual willingness to contribute to the team's needs (regardless of disciplinary role)Establishing collective identity & "rhythm" of communication/debrief/delegation/etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Lack of clarity on individual and team roles → defaulting to patterns of disproportionate division of laborRigidity in limited conception of personal scopeLack of motivation or structural accountability which could compensateFrustration amongst team members

Our study was limited due to scope of research, limited number of interviewees, an imbalance of disciplines represented, lack of input by refugee clients relevant to the study, and data comprised of only post hoc-reflections. These results will be used to develop a second generation of the course. Hopefully these results will also generate conversation surrounding the importance of interdisciplinary team praxis in serving the complex needs of resettled refugees.

Considerations for Educational Settings

- Provide knowledge of resources for serving refugees** and how to access those resources early on.
- Have a social worker on the team.** They were perceived as a critical role due to their skills in case management, mental health awareness/counseling skills, and rapport building.
- Clearly define public health's role and skillset in an interdisciplinary team serving refugees** to avoid uncertain roles and responsibilities.
- 'Soft skills'** should be emphasized in curriculum.
- Set team expectations early and clearly define skills, personal and professional strengths, and weaknesses.** Set ground rules, expectations for division of labor, communication patterns, and get to know one another.
- Create time and space for regular professional and peer evaluation**, as well as reflection as an interdisciplinary group and discipline-specific conversations.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the efforts and participation of the students of the 2017-18 Refugee Health and Wellness Class. We would also like to thank the course instructors, Dr. Martha Carlough (UNC-CH, Family Medicine) and Josh Hinson, MSW (UNC-CH, School of Social Work) for their support, teaching, and guidance. Additional thanks goes to the School of Public Health, School of Medicine, & NC AHCE.

Work Cited:
1. NC Refugee Health Program of the NC Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2016
2. Atul Gawande. Cowboys and Pit Crews. The New Yorker, 2011.