An Innovative Approach to Interprofessional Training Through a Medical-Legal Partnership

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Background
Project HEAL (Health, Education, Advocacy, and Law) is a comprehensive medical-legal partnership (MLP) staffed by two attorneys within the Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities (MCDD) at Kennedy Krieger Institute in Baltimore, Maryland. Project HEAL provides quality advocacy and legal services to low- and moderate-income families raising children with intellectual and developmental disabilities who receive clinical services at Kennedy Krieger Institute.

Project HEAL hosts trainees predominantly from schools of law, as well as trainees in the fields of public health, social work, and education, and other disciplines. The recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) report—“Interprofessional Education for Collaboration: Learning How to Improve Health Professionals Across the Continuum of Education to Practice”—emphasizes the importance of engaging students in interprofessional education and experiential learning and the value it adds to the existing workforce (Cuff, 2013). According to the World Health Organization, “interprofessional education occurs when students from two or more professions learn about, from, and with each other to enable effective collaboration” (Baker, 2010). Project HEAL trainees have the opportunity to work collaboratively with other students and professionals from various disciplines to develop and implement clients’ plans for legal and medical care in concert with the family.

Pre-service Training Program
One unique feature of Project HEAL is its pre-service training program, designed to build capacity in serving more children and families who are in need of advocacy and legal services. The interdisciplinary pre-service training provides degree-seeking students with an experiential and instructional program aimed at preparing future leaders across disciplines to integrate disability-related care and services and special education advocacy, law, and policy into their future practice.

Pre-service Project HEAL trainees at the MCDD participate in various training activities to achieve competency in special education advocacy, law, and policy. Knowledge about the impact of education on the health and well-being of children with disabilities; awareness of challenges and issues related to families raising children with disabilities, and experience in interprofessionalism.

Project HEAL Pre-service Training Logic Model

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<tr>
<th>Context/Situation</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The pre-service training provides an experiential and instructional program aimed at preparing future leaders across multiple disciplines to integrate disability-related care and services into their practice.</td>
<td>Increased numbers of pre-service trainees with knowledge about education law, and policy</td>
<td>Increased numbers of professionals that directly and indirectly work with individuals with disabilities</td>
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Data and Proposed Outcomes
Since the spring of 2006, a total of 108 trainees have participated in the Project HEAL pre-service training program, contributing over 12,900 hours of work. Trainees are affiliated with various academic institutions across the country, and represent a diverse group of individuals at different stages in their academic career (high school through doctoral programs). The majority of trainees are law students (surpassing 71 of the 108 trainees), 17 of whom returned for more than one semester.

The main objectives of the program are to expose trainees to the diverse opportunities in the field of special education advocacy, law, and policy; to allow them to connect their experiences to their current academic career; and to provide them with direction in exploring potential future professional careers. The proposed short-term outcomes of the pre-service training program are: (1) to increase the number of pre-service trainees with knowledge about special education advocacy, law, and policy; (2) to increase the number of pre-service trainees with knowledge of the impact of education and other social determinants on health; (3) to increase the number of pre-service trainees with understanding of the “Disability Perspective Experience”; and (4) to increase the number of pre-service trainees with insight into future professional plans.

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