# Editorial:
# Excursions into the Science
# of Interprofessional Education

**Hassan Soubhi, MD, PhD**

Welcome to *JRIPE*'s first published excursions into the science of interprofessional practice and education. Five groups of authors have contributed to these outings that I think you will enjoy.

In their short report Broers et al. [1] examine the meaning of the words "interprofessional collaboration" from the perspectives of health care students. As Steven Pinker [2] puts it, a word is a "pairing between a sound and a meaning" (2000, p. 2), and by emitting the sound, we can fill one another's heads with an idea. Although students may say the words "interprofessional collaboration" similarly, the meanings they attach to them and the ideas they fill each other's heads with may differ. Broers et al. looked into those differences to identify gaps in perception. The first step to improving interprofessional education, the authors argue, is in understanding those gaps—what they mean and why they occur. Understanding and responding to those gaps may also be one of the keys to significantly improving interprofessional practice.

Meanings and perceptions were also examined in the next three articles, either through interviews, surveys, or a mix of both. Hollenberg et al. [3] explore the overarching impact of a large-scale multi-site interprofessional education initiative [4]. Using a realistic evaluation framework, their research provides insights into the perceptions, ideas, and experiences of interprofessional education from program developers, facilitators, and attendees. The authors identify a series of professional, educational, and organizational outcomes of the initiative and show how these outcomes may be examples of mainstreaming of interprofessional education [5].

With Kwan et al. [6] we delve into experimental research [7]. The authors start with a specific hypothesis: that clinical faculty who participated in a structured faculty development program in interprofessional education would demonstrate significant improvements in their knowledge, skills, and attitudes as compared with clinical faculty who did not complete the program. The findings seem in favor of the null hypothesis, and we learn much about the feasibility of the experimentation, appreciate the attention to detail it requires, and, just as interesting, review a series of potential explanations for inconclusive results. The authors close their discussion with an encouraging note about the search for experimental evidence of the value of faculty development to support interprofessional education. We can follow on their example.

MacDonald et al. [8] provide an example of quasi-experimental research [7]. Combining qualitative and quantitative data, they take us into the realm of palliative care. Using the Staged Innovation Design [9], they assess the effectiveness of

an online resource to stimulate the transfer of knowledge to the workplace and to foster interprofessional patient-centred care among staff in long-term care homes. We learn that the evidence regarding changes in learners' attitudes toward interprofessional care and transfer of knowledge was weak, and we learn much about the inventiveness that went into designing the intervention and the sustained collaboration among the investigators that made the results trustworthy.

The final article by Nicol et al. [10] presents a review of randomized controlled trials in the area of Internet-mediated home monitoring systems for the management of chronically ill patients—an important area of practice that has considerable impact on how we could organize interprofessional practice. Questions remain, however, particularly when we learn that studies seldom addressed the effects of these interventions on the work of care providers and their interprofessional communication and practices.

Taken together, all the studies in this issue show a fair amount of industry in observing and collecting facts, and a fair share of invention as well as common sense. They are valuable examples of scientific, data-driven efforts that seek to provide a strong basis to interprofessional education and advance our confidence in its effectiveness. Let the search continue.

### References

1. Broers, T., Poth, C., & Medves, J. (2009). What's in a word? Understanding "interprofessional collaboration" from the Students' perspective. Journal of Research in Interprofessional Practice & Education, 1(1), pp. 3-9.
2. Pinker, S. (2000). *Words and rules: The ingredients of language*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.
3. Hollenberg, E., Reeves, S., Beduz, M. Agnus, Jeffs, L., Kwan D., Lee, J., Lowe, M., Merkley, J., Sinclair, L., Tassone, M., Oandasan, I. (2009). Mainstreaming interprofessional education within hospital settings: Findings from a multiple case study. *Journal of Research in Interprofessional Practice & Education, 1*(1), pp. 10-23.
4. Pawson, R., & Tilley, N.. (2007). *Realistic evaluation*. London: Sage Publications.
5. Barr, H., & Ross, F. (2006). Mainstreaming interprofessional education in the United Kingdom: A position paper. *Journal of Interprofessional Care, 20*(2), 96-104.
6. Kwan, D., Barker, K., Richardson, D., Wagner, S.J., & Austin, Z. (2009). Efficacy of a faculty development program in fostering interprofessional education competencies. *Journal of Research in Interprofessional Practice & Education, 1*(1), pp. 24-41.
7. Shadish, W.R., Cook, T.D., & Campbell, D.T. (2001). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for generalized causal inference* (2nd ed.). Orlando, FL: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
8. MacDonald, C.J., Stodel, E.J., Hall, P., & Weaver, L. (2009). The impact of an online learning resource designed to enhance interprofessional collaborative practice in palliative care: Findings from the caring together pilot project. *Journal of Research in Interprofessional Practice & Education, 1*(1), pp. 42-66.
9. Wagner, N. (1984). Instructional product evaluation using the Staged Innovation Design. *Journal of Instructional Development, 7*(2), 24-27.
10. Nicol, A-M., Gee Bush, C., & Balka, E. (2009). Internet devices and desires: A review of randomized controlled trials of interactive, Internet-mediated, in-home, chronic disease monitoring programs. *Journal of Research in Interprofessional Practice & Education, 1*(1), pp. 67-84.

Journal of Research in
**Interprofessional
Practice and
Education**

Vol. 1.1
November, 2009

www.jripe.org