

Interdisciplinary learning: lawyers and doctors

MedLaw at Plymouth University

Pippa Trimble Law
Kerry Gilbert Medicine



Context

HE focus on employability and interdisciplinary research and/or learning

Government, society and employers increasingly looking for

- agile learners who can utilise their graduate skills rather than simply accrue knowledge
- Skills to work in multi-professional teams and adopt holistic approaches to complex problems

(Lyall et al 2015)

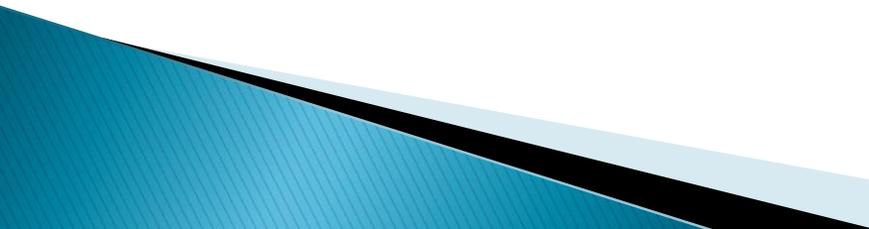
MedLaw

NHS LA 2015–16 damages paid £950.4M

Interdisciplinary/Interprofessional

- ▶ No agreed definition or methodology
- ▶ Aspects relevant to MedLaw
 - Work that takes place at the cross-roads of 2 or more disciplines (Boix-Nansill 2004)
 - collaborations between students from differing subject areas in pooling their disciplinary knowledge in addressing complex and significant, real world problems. (Woods 2006)
 - IP: When 2 or more professions learn with, from and about each other to improve collaboration (WHO 2010, CAIPE)

Aims of the Project

- ▶ Increased understanding of aspects of medical law (consent, capacity, negligence, end of life; abortion)
 - ▶ Increased understanding of their own and the other's discipline/profession; language, culture and approach to relevant legal and ethical issues in practice
 - ▶ Transferable skills from ID/IP interaction
 - ▶ Law students, enhanced employability
- 

Format of MedLaw

- ▶ “fully integrated” ie.combined learning, co-delivery
 - ▶ 4 x Stage 3 Law + 4 x Stage 3 Med
 - ▶ EBL scenario, real context
 - 3 x 2hour sessions over 4 weeks plus self directed learning
 - ▶ Delivered and assessed within existing discipline modules
 - ▶ Small group, discursive promoting mutual education/challenge!
- 

Participants

- ▶ 3rd year students
 - ▶ Staff – law and medicine
 - ▶ Students (and staff!) need to be
 - Competent, confident
 - Open-minded, capable of challenging and being challenged
 - Good communicators, capable of reducing technical terms to simple everyday language
- 

Delivery – the learning

Why EBL?

Learning not teaching

- ▶ Relevance to professional practice: real world context and skills
 - ▶ Small group – opportunities for discussion, challenge, integration, peer to peer learning
 - ▶ Needs to negotiate discipline differences and provide a safe place
- 

Delivery – the “teaching”

- ▶ Need collaboration in planning, teaching, integration and evaluation (Shibley 2006)
- ▶ Why did it work for us?
 - Willingness to collaborate/desire to make it work
 - Belief in value add of ID providing benefits to each discipline
 - Different areas of expertise (PBL/Practice and Law)
 - Pedagogical approach similar
 - Happy to be spontaneous – benefit of PBL
 - Ability to talk/debate within sessions enco students to do so
 - discipline based assessment
 - Turn taking in delivery – not planned, could be improved

Successes

- ▶ Learning aims met
 - ▶ Student feedback very positive
 - ▶ Law student enhanced employability
 - ▶ Overcame potential hurdles
 - Discipline specific terminology, philosophy, pedagogy
 - Team teaching
- 

Difficulties

- ▶ Sustainability

Lyall 2015

Our findings highlight the role of the committed, entrepreneurial academic as a key driver, and the fact that interdisciplinary teaching is often an activity that takes place at the margins of mainstream teaching. This is a risky strategy for the sustainability of interdisciplinary learning and teaching: if it is not to rely solely on the efforts of individual champions, greater institutionalisation will be necessary.

- ▶ Limited topics
 - ▶ Brevity of module
 - ▶ Group size
 - ▶ Assessment
 - ▶ Timetabling
- 

Moving forward

- ▶ Need for shared space – devt of moodle site
 - ▶ Mini-teach prep/consolidation sessions
 - ▶ More sessions with same students
 - ▶ Considering other possible ID/IP collaborations
 - ▶ Sustainability
- 

Recommendations

- ▶ Identify student group carefully – level, discipline, attitudes etc
 - ▶ Keep PBL/EBL groups to 8 or less
 - ▶ Use experienced facilitators with similar levels of content knowledge
 - ▶ Staff need to want to collaborate, team teach and have similar pedagogical approaches
- 

From the students

- **Do you feel that cross-disciplinary work enhances your understanding of another profession? Could be useful when you are subsequently an independent practitioner? If not, please give reasons. If so, please explain how.**
- **Med Student:** *Most definitely, not only does it help me understand how lawyers think, it has also helped me to develop an understanding of some of the most important areas within medicine and how I must always be conscious of some of the things that I am doing. For example when writing in patient notes I am more wary of the level of detail I am writing in and making sure that all major discussion points are addressed.*
- **Law student:** *I definitely feel that cross-disciplinary work has enhanced my understanding of another profession. I feel that we have had a little bit of an insight into some of the day-to-day issues that medical students deal with. Some of this initially seemed mundane i.e. when patient's medical notes could not be found when the patient had a cardiac arrest. This simple issue meant that no one absolutely knew what the patient's wishes were. From listening to anecdotal evidence, there are many occasions when they do not always have essential information at their fingertips and have to make decisions in the best interests of a patient, right or wrong.*

- Law Student: *I do consider that the cross – disciplinary learning with the medics has assisted my learning of how the medical profession works. Listening to some of the medics' experiences it is easy to see how their primary aim is the care of the patient and possibly not always all legalities that may have to be considered. Hospital wards and departments are very busy places dealing with very ill people and listening to some of the stories, it is easy to see how errors can arise. I do understand the likely defences to a claim and have more of an understanding of how errors can occur. That said from a legal perspective, many of them are still down to possible avoidable human error.*

References

- ▶ Lyall et al (2015) “Interdisciplinary provision in HE”
- ▶ Chettiparamb (2007) “Interdisciplinarity: a literature review”
- ▶ Shearer (2007) “Implementing a new interdisciplinary module: the challenges and the benefits of working across disciplines”
- ▶ Andrade et al (2014) “ Finding your way in the interdisciplinary forest: notes on educating future conservation practitioners”
- ▶ Woods (2007) “ Researching and developing interdisciplinary teaching: towards a conceptual framework for classroom communication”
- ▶ Newell (2010) Educating for a complex world; integrative learning and interdisciplinary studies
- ▶ Fordement, Klein et al “The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity”
- ▶ Shibley (2006), “Interdisciplinary team teaching: negotiating pedagogical differences”
- ▶ Sandholz (2000) “Interdisciplinary team teaching as a form of professional development”
- ▶ Perry & Stewart (2005) “ Insights into effective partnership in interdisciplinary team teaching”