## Abstract

Healthcare systems have become increasingly complex due to technology, medical advances, socioeconomic divides, and provider specialization. With these changes, there is a growing need for collaborative healthcare practice to avoid gaps in care delivery.

In order to best train future providers, interprofessional models have been proposed as a method of bridging healthcare gaps. Optometry is one of many professions that is starting to embrace interprofessional care. The purpose of this review is to assess the viability of interprofessional education as part of a core optometry curriculum based on substantiated data that such efforts are necessary in healthcare delivery.

## Purpose

This literature review presents the current state of delivery of optometric interprofessional education and training. In particular, the review focuses on the education of optometry students and their role in interprofessional education in the past, present, and future. The proposed function of this review is to serve as part of a larger movement towards evidence-based interprofessional changes that spur growth and collaboration within the field of optometry.

## Background

The noted benefits of interprofessional collaboration between eye care and other providers were evident over a hundred years ago, when Mary Richmond described the merits of interprofessional practice in *Social Diagnosis* (Long, 2017). Although potential benefits have been documented, the implementation of interprofessional care (IPC) continues to face many challenges. One such challenge is the ability for students to gain exposure to methods of practice that encourage the use of interprofessional practice in the future delivery of their care. Optometry is a relatively small profession compared to many of those highlighted in the IPE (interprofessional education) literature. However, as many systemic conditions are closely tied to health indicators seen in the eyes, optometrists play an important role as gatekeeper for patients’ other health needs.

## Systems Approach / Future Direction

Systems thinking, or the understanding that every person and process is richly integrated and dependent upon each other, is a useful approach to defining the importance of collaborative healthcare (Peters, 2014). This model of systems thinking is a compelling reminder of the importance for strong communication between healthcare professions. In a recent survey analysis, Baker (2015) asked for optometric institutions to provide data on the extent of interprofessional education and practice within each of the existing US schools and colleges of optometry. This enlightening survey demonstrated the status of current IPE practices at each institution. It reported the types of IPE delivery, the IPE barriers that were faced by the institutions, and the status of IPE as being either required or optional in the curricula. What stood out in this report was the number of institutions that integrate IPE into their curricula in some form: 19 out of 21 institutions have established optometric IPE and training (Baker, 2015). Further, there were distinct goals for optometric institutions that arose as part of this survey information. These include connecting optometric and other leaders in IPE to increase awareness and abilities, communicate and share current best practices within IPE, and to assist one another in the development of future strategies to implement IPE (Baker, 2015). What is still unclear, however, is if each of these programs truly meets an agreed-upon definition of IPE.

## Final Thoughts / Next Steps

Although IPE is becoming more common within optometric training programs, the data to show effectiveness of training pre-licensed providers when evaluating post-licensure care is still unclear (Zwarenstein et al., 2005). More research is needed to determine the best models of IPE delivery for optometry students and how this influences long-term outcomes for both students and patients.

**Next Steps:**
1. Review current practices within individual optometric institutions.
2. Provide evidence-based results demonstrating beneficial outcomes of IPE/IPC for both students and patients.

## References


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