Interprofessional education (IPE) is increasingly viewed by both international health organizations and higher education accreditation bodies as a prerequisite to achieving the “Triple Aim” of improving the patient experience of care, increasing the overall health of communities, and reducing the per capita costs of health care. In response, leaders of five health science schools at U-M agreed in 2014 to jointly prepare their students for such a future by developing a new course, Team-Based Clinical Decision Making. Launched in winter 2015, this course serves more than 250 students from dentistry, medicine, nursing, pharmacy, and social work. It focuses on two core IPE competencies: understanding the roles of the various health professions and acquiring effective teamwork skills.

Grouped in interdisciplinary teams of 6-8 members that last the entire semester, students rotate through two-week modules designed by each of the five schools. Patient scenarios mirror the complexities of healthcare in the field. Examples include communication during handoffs of care between providers, difficult family dynamics, and decision regret. As they create care plans, students practice both making decisions as an integrated healthcare team and acting as the voice for their profession. Breaking down silos (and learning from and respecting each other’s disciplines) produces better equipped graduates, many of whom will become leaders in their professions.

Examples of Teaching Innovation

Focusing on elements of high-performing teams bookends the discipline-specific modules.

After racing to build the highest marshmallow tower, students analyze team performance and set process rules for future team functioning.

Using an instrument validated in healthcare settings, teams assess their capacity for highly effective teamwork in Week 4 and Week 13.