The MAC H²OPE Clinic: Helping Hamiltonians through Occupational and Physiotherapy Engagement Project Summary

Collaboration and Interdisciplinarity

The MAC H²OPE Clinic is a joint initiative between the School of Rehabilitation Science (physiotherapy and occupational therapy programs) and the YMCA of Hamilton/ Burlington / Brantford through the Live Well Partnership. The funding that was received through the Forward with Integrity Fund (FWIF) provided the initial resources to establish MAC H²OPE as a multidisciplinary, service learning based clinic, at the Downtown Family YMCA in Hamilton. Background work was initiated by the grant team in the winter / spring of 2013 to allow for the first inter-professional student placement to start at the clinic between July – Sept 2013. Three students, 1 Master of Science (occupational therapy (OT)) student and 2 Master of Science (physiotherapy (PT)) students completed their final clinical placements at the MAC H²OPE Clinic under the supervision of 3 community based therapists (2 physiotherapists, 1 occupational therapist) and 2 faculty members. The second clinical placement started on November 4th, and additional students have already been assigned to the MAC H²OPE Clinic for January 2014. We are fortunate most of the community clinicians are returning to supervise student placements each term.

During the first clinical rotation the students were able to provide service to 25 individuals over an 8 week period. There is now a waiting list of over 50 individuals for MAC H²OPE Clinic services. Community programs / agencies not originally identified as partners in the project (i.e. the Good Sheppard Steps to Health Program and the MS Society – Hamilton Branch) have referred clients to the MAC H²OPE Clinic and / or have requested additional information to share with their client base. The MAC H²OPE Clinic has connected with additional community groups. As a result of these linkages students from the clinic are going to present to a drop-in group who meets with a Harm Reduction Worker at Wesley Urban Ministry on Nov 18th, 2013. The presentation will discuss the MAC H²OPE Clinic and how physiotherapy and occupational therapy professionals may assist group members in meeting their personal health and wellness goals. The preparation for the presentation will allow the McMaster student to investigate and gain knowledge of some of the health challenges facing individuals who utilize the Wesley Urban Ministry Harm Reduction Worker service.

Initiation of Other Projects & Exposure of Students to Research

As a result of the success of the MAC H²OPE Clinic, a new research project funded by the Physiotherapy Foundation of Canada (Dal Bello-Haas, et al.), is starting at MAC H²OPE this term. This project is investigating changes in clinical outcomes and clients’ experiences with the services provided by the clinic. As part of this new initiative, MSc(OT) and (PT) students will be involved in data collection and the research process and will be developed related knowledge and skills – not typically encountered during more ‘traditional’ clinical placement settings. In addition, the students who participated in the MAC H²OPE Clinic during the summer 2013 had the opportunity to share their experiences about having a placement at the MAC H²OPE Clinic with the Hamilton and McMaster communities, via a Hamilton Spectator article (published Oct 4, 2013), and the FHS Network Magazine (to be printed) – these activities provided the opportunity for the students to experience media relations, advocating for the profession, and professional “branding” first hand. These opportunities were reflected upon in the e-portfolio submissions by the students – student noted they enjoyed the challenge of communicating their roles with those who are not as familiar with their professions and what their professions have to offer regarding health and wellness.

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An Experience Beyond Traditional Borders

The MAC H²OPE Clinic offers students an opportunity to interact with Hamilton residents who have complex health care needs, and who have often struggled to find an entry into the rehabilitation sector of the health care system. The presenting health care needs / goals of MAC H²OPE Clinic are very diverse, and are challenging students to consider all aspects of the social determinants of health and how to connect clients with existing community agencies/ resources. This aspect of client is also more unique compared to clients seen in more ‘traditional’ placement settings, where the student would likely not experience such a diverse patient case load and / or have to interact with and refer clients to existing community resources to the same extent. In addition, the MAC H²OPE Clinic is allowing the students to learn first hand about the unmet need that exists in the health care sector for their professional services, and the role that outreach / service learning can contribute to the health goals of a community. To reinforce this learning, as part of the e-portfolio submissions during their clinical placements, students are researching topics related to providing service to “at risk populations”. This exercise is expanding students’ knowledge base in areas introduced during academic terms, but not typically focused on during more traditional clinical placements.

In more traditional clinical placements, students engaged with an established /pre-existing program that continues to operate even when the students are not in place. The students placed at the MAC H²OPE Clinic are also learning to consider how to provide evidence-based service to a broad client base in a short period of time, how to refer to community services and how to utilize home programming to meet the clients’ needs. This is challenging the students to consider population health perspectives and unique approaches to service delivery as part of overall client care management – additional experiences that would likely not be afforded in more ‘traditional settings’.

Sustainability and Expansion

The community need for and success of the MAC H²OPE Clinic has been demonstrated through the growing waiting list and referral of clients to the program through a number of (and growing) community agencies. The plan is to continue to offer clinical placements each term, with a focus on overlapping PT and OT students when academic timetables allow. We are also in early discussions with a community organization regarding how to continue to provide services when the students are not on clinical placements to allow for service continuity. The initial grant proposal has been successful in meeting the objectives of:

1) Providing underserved Hamilton residents with direct access to occupational therapy and physiotherapy services in a community setting;
2) Providing student OTs and PTs with the opportunity to integrate into a community setting;
3) Creating innovative research partnerships between community residents, students, and the YMCA of Hamilton/ Burlington/ Brantford.
4) Exposing students to new and emerging roles, research and experiences beyond traditional borders

We would like to acknowledge and thank the FWIF for providing the initial resources to establish this service. The initial funding was important for the establishment of the MAC H²OPE Clinic; however, one of our challenges is now to find creative solutions to secure ongoing funding in order to allow for continued growth and development of the MAC H²OPE Clinic.