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Training in pediatric school psychology: A model for interdisciplinary collaboration

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Background on Pediatric School Psychology

- Approximately 20% of children and adolescents are affected by a mental disorder (National Institute of Mental Health, 2005); 22% suffer from obesity, and an additional 10% suffer from asthma (Creer & Bender, 1995; Troiano, Flegal, Kuczmarski, Campbell, & Johnson, 1999).
- Educational reform emphasizes that schools must begin to address how mental and physical health issues are potential barriers to learning (Adelman & Taylor, 1998).
- An interdisciplinary approach is necessary to meet the multiple needs of children across systems (Power, Shapiro, & DuPaul, 2003).
- The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), American Psychological Association (APA), and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) have developed specific training guidelines for inter-systemic collaboration (Power, DuPaul, Shapiro, & Kazak, 2003).
- Recently, pediatric school psychology training has been recommended to promote interdisciplinary collaboration and communication (Power, DuPaul et al., 2003; Shaw, 2003).
- To address this need, a collaborative partnership between the School Psychology Program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) and the Munroe Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) was developed to provide school psychology doctoral students with interdisciplinary leadership training.

Interdisciplinary Conjoint Behavioral Consultation

Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC) is an interdisciplinary service delivery model identified as "highly useful" to address the health needs of children and families across multiple systems (Power, DuPaul et al., 2003).

CBC is a partnership-centered, indirect model of service delivery wherein parents, educators, health professionals, and consultants work collaboratively to meet a child's developmental needs, address concerns, and achieve success by promoting the competencies of all parties (Sheridan & Kretchmer, in press).

The four stages of the CBC process include: (1) conjoint needs identification; (2) conjoint needs analysis; (3) treatment implementation; and (4) treatment evaluation.

Research has demonstrated CBC as an effective and acceptable model for addressing the needs of children who are at risk for academic, behavioral, and/or social difficulties (Sheridan, Eagle, Cowan, & Mickelson, 2001).

The CBC model provides a framework for (a) aligning the family, school, and healthcare systems to facilitate the integration of children with health problems into school and into (b) integrating systems of care into the problem-solving process (Power, DuPaul et al., 2003).

Preliminary research has demonstrated that CBC can be an effective model for addressing the multiple needs of children in a pediatric setting (Sheridan et al., 2004).

A more structured approach to training in interdisciplinary collaboration and CBC in a pediatric setting is warranted.

Challenges for Pediatric School Psychology Training

- Educators, psychologists, and medical professionals have different goals, language and approaches to working with children and families (Pettos, 1999).
- Health reimbursement systems may not support many of the activities outlined as best practices by the NIMH, APA, and NASP training guidelines (Power, DuPaul et al., 2003).
- Training faculty need to provide students with intensive training in both interdisciplinary intervention and health-related issues, both of which are lacking in training programs (Power, Shapiro, & DuPaul, 2003).
- Training in pediatric school psychology may require students to spend additional time in preparation to become psychologists (Power, DuPaul et al., 2003).

Research/Future Directions

- Program evaluation research needs to investigate the outcomes (e.g., knowledge and skill level, future employment) of this specialized interdisciplinary training model.
- Research needs to evaluate the effectiveness and social validity of interdisciplinary CBC to address the needs of children and to strengthen partnerships across family, school, and medical settings.
- Identification of the role of specialized school psychologists in addressing cross-cutting issues across multiple systems (i.e., school integration, adherence to treatment programs, pharmacological management) is necessary.