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Using virtual communities to improve learning in mental health curriculum

Authors: Bruno Hipólito; Rosalie Belian; Pedro Fonsêca; Eliane Nóbrega; Jeane Couto; Kleber Araújo



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Introduction

Virtual communities or on-line collaborative spaces have been increasingly used as tools to promote collaborative learning and knowledge sharing in healthcare.

We have been using its resources to engage stakeholders in clinical discussions in mental health at the psychology service at IMIP, a teaching hospital in Pernambuco, Brazil.



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Introduction

The major goal of our program is to offer a learning environment to support clinical activities related to mental health, considering the broad spectrum of specialties:

- oncology, gynecology, pediatrics, obstetrics, STD, transplants, hemodialysis, assisted reproduction, bariatric surgery, motor rehabilitation, etc.

Thus, the subjects discussed were categorized based on life cycle and is specificities.



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Methods

The chosen methodology is problem-based learning (PBL), clinical staff, interns and students are challenged to search academic literature and their autonomy is reinforced as they try to solve complex clinical problems.

Clinical discussions are conducted using a virtual environment (but the first and final sessions).

The system maintains records of all clinical cases discussed which are organized as: infants, children, adolescents, adults/seniors, psychological evaluation lab and free theme discussions.



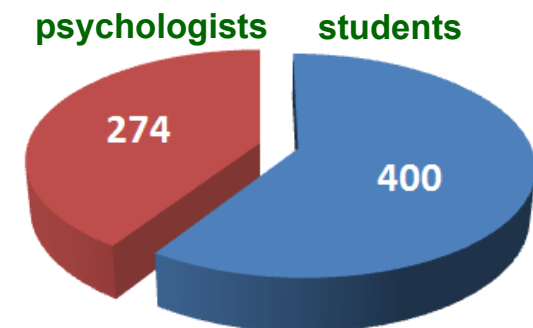
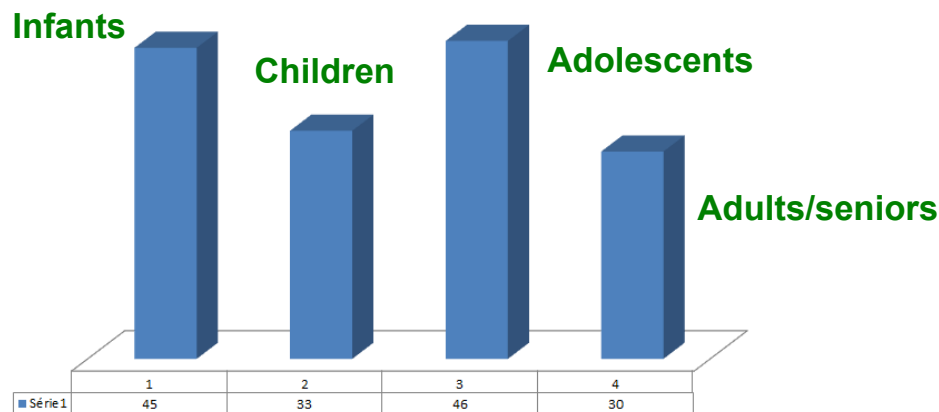
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Result and discussion

From February to August 2012, we had 46 participants engaged in clinical cases discussions.

The number of clinical cases presented was distributed as infants (45), children (33), adolescents (46) and adults/seniors (30).

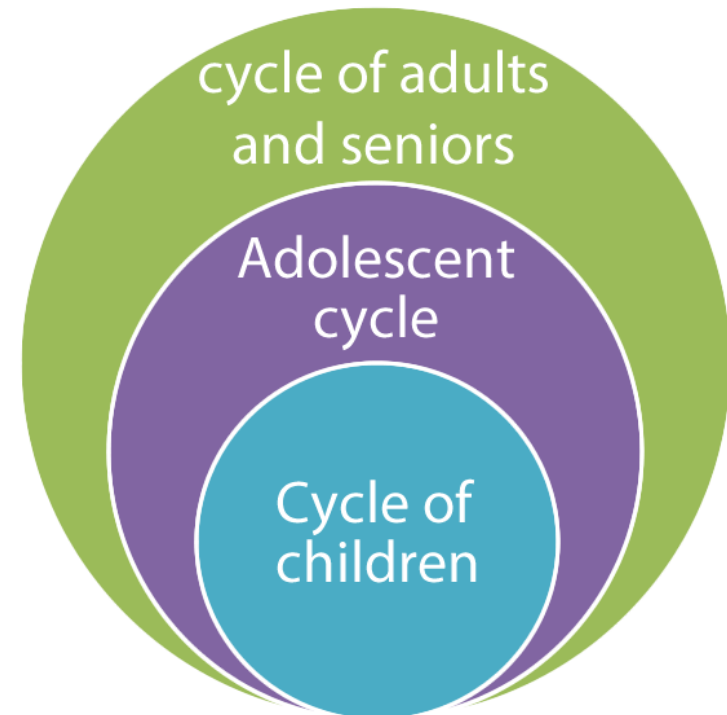
During this period, 674 comments were posted on the virtual community (400 from students and 274 from psychologists).



Result and discussion

The topics which participants were most engaged in the discussions were:

- in the cycle of children, "Parenthood transference in childhood care" and "The neutrality and impartiality in the therapeutic relationship";
- in the adolescent cycle, "The bullying phenomenon in the adolescence" and;
- in the cycle of adults/seniors, "The insertion of psychoanalysis in the hospital setting and possibilities of intervention".





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Conclusion and Comments

We have experienced in our initiative the benefits of a virtual community as **improving communication** among psychology staff and students, promoting **knowledge sharing**, easing the usage of **multimedia** and **academic content** in clinical cases discussion and facilitating the **assessment of students** in managing mental health issues.

We believe this program contributes to develop skills in our students, to increase the use of **appropriate terminology** when referring to mental health issues; to use **professional peers** as intellectual support; and to improve clinically relevant **search capabilities**.

On the other hand, we have identified the following drawbacks: as students have reported they “feel constantly under evaluation” and also, “difficulties in identifying relevant sources of academic material in the Internet”.



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Integral
Prof. Fernando
Figueira

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Rosalie Barreto Belian

rosalie.belian@ufpe.br



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