



## BIRD'S EYE VIEW ON TEAMWORK IN HEALTHCARE

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### Abstract

Healthcare has become one of India's largest sectors - both in terms of revenue and employment. A healthcare system that supports effective teamwork can improve the quality of patient care, enhance patient safety, and reduce workload issues that cause burnout among healthcare professionals. Yet there is little formal training in teamwork skill development in undergraduate or postgraduate health professional education programs – teamwork skills are largely learned 'on the job'. In healthcare, where patient outcomes are dependent on effective interdisciplinary teamwork, there is need for better preparation of health professionals in teamwork. This study endeavors to explore the types of teams operating in healthcare system, its contribution to patient care and or healthcare, common barriers to healthcare teams and strategies to overcome it. Finally the study also assumes to provide tips for healthcare professionals to practice teamwork.

**Key Words:** Healthcare, Nurses, Teamwork, Types, Importance, Barriers, Strategies.

### Introduction

Healthcare has become one of India's largest sectors - both in terms of revenue and employment. The overall Indian healthcare market today is worth US\$ 100 billion and is expected to grow to US\$ 280 billion by 2020, a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 22.9 per cent. Healthcare delivery, which includes hospitals, nursing homes and diagnostics centers, and pharmaceuticals, constitutes 65 per cent of the overall market. Teamwork is essential in the provision of healthcare. A healthcare system that supports effective teamwork can improve the quality of patient care, enhance patient safety, and reduce workload issues that cause burnout among healthcare professionals. The division of labor among medical, nursing and allied health practitioners means that no single professional can deliver a complete episode of healthcare. Yet there is little formal training in teamwork skill development in undergraduate or postgraduate health professional education programs – teamwork skills are largely learned 'on the job'. In healthcare, where patient outcomes are dependent on effective interdisciplinary teamwork, there is need for better preparation of health professionals in teamwork.

### Health-Care Teams

Health-care teams interact dynamically and have the common goal of delivering health services to patients. Regardless of their nature, teams share certain characteristics. These include the team members needing to:

- Possess specialized and complementary knowledge and skills.
- Know their role and the roles of others in the team(s) and interact with one another to achieve a common goal;
- Make decisions.
- Possess specialized knowledge and skills and often function under high-workload conditions.
- Act as a collective unit, as a result of the interdependency of the tasks performed by team members.

### The Different Types of Teams Found in Health Care

#### Core Teams

Core teams consist of team leaders and members who are directly involved in caring for the patient. Core-team members include direct-care providers such as nurses, pharmacists, doctors, dentists, assistants and, of course, the patient or their cared. They also include continuity providers—those who manage the patient from assessment to discharge, for example, case managers.

#### Coordinating Teams

The coordinating team is the group responsible for day-to-day operational management, coordination functions and resource management for core teams.

#### Contingency Teams

Contingency teams are formed for emergent or specific events (e.g. cardiac-arrest teams, disaster-response teams, obstetric-emergency teams, rapid-response teams). The members of a contingency team are drawn from a variety of core teams.

#### Ancillary Services

Ancillary service teams consist of individuals such as cleaners or domestic staff who provide direct, task-specific, time-



Limited care to patients or support services that facilitate patient care. The members of these teams are often not located where patients receive routine care.

### **Support Services and Administration**

Support services teams consist of individuals who provide indirect, task-specific services in a health-care facility. Administration includes the executive leadership of a unit or facility and has 24-hour accountability for the overall functioning of the organization.

### **The Importance of Teamwork in Nursing**

In today's healthcare market, the practice of teamwork has gained in popularity. This is especially true for professional nurses. When nurses function as part of a unit, and when they act as part of a team, the job itself is easier and more efficient. Moreover, overall patient care is enhanced. The relationship between the nurse and the physician is paramount. The physician orders necessary intervention and the nurse is responsible for carrying it out. And it is crucial that all team members work together and communicate effectively. Any changes in the patients' status, whether deterioration or improvement, should be shared between team members.

Specifically within healthcare, there has been a growing awareness of the need to improve teamwork. The Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Hospitals (JCAHO) in July 2004 released a Sentinel Event Alert on the prevention of infant deaths. Its database showed that nearly three-quarters of hospitals cited communication breakdown and teamwork problems as a major reason for these deaths. The JCAHO recommended that hospitals conduct formal team training to the obstetrical/perinatal team.

The Institute for Health care Improvement also recognizes the importance of teamwork. In their book, "Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century," teamwork is cited as essential in caring for patients with complex problems. They strongly conclude that "effective working teams must be created and maintained."

### **Advantages of Teamwork in Today's Healthcare Organizations**

Workplace becomes more enjoyable and productive when you're able to operate as a team, safety issues are reduced and retention rates increase, according to research reported in Healthcare Papers. At the same time, patient care improves with seamless teamwork.

### **Responsive**

When health care providers work as a team, they can be more responsive to changes as they occur, according to a research team funded by the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation and published in Healthcare Papers. When a patient's condition worsens, the team looks to the leader, knowing that each person on the team can fulfill his respective duties and work with others to solve problems. Trust develops in a cohesive team, increasing confidence in your partners, knowing they will fulfill their duties during a crisis. Nurses, doctors and assistants working as a team tend to make fewer mistakes, leading to improved patient outcomes.

### **Satisfaction**

Patients are more satisfied with their care when health care professionals collaborate, researchers supported by the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation found. The health care team and the patients experience less stress when members of the team fulfill their duties, knowing their counterparts are working toward coordinated goals. When the roles are clear among team members, there is less confusion about patients' treatment plans. At the same time, when communication is clear among the team, patients also experience greater clarity about their treatment and expected outcome.

### **Efficiency**

Teams that are highly involved in treatment plans and service delivery tend to be more efficient and utilize resources better. An article published in Clinical Laboratory Management Review reports that when health care providers adopt the team approach to medical care, mirroring the success achieved in other industries that employ teamwork techniques, facilities become more competitive and save money. With strong team leadership, efficiency is realized even more when health care teams are empowered to design their work plans according to their skills and resources, according to BMC Health Services Research.

### **Effectiveness**

Team members are more effective health care providers when they work together because they tend to learn more about what



role each member plays. The University Of North Carolina School Of Medicine explains that your education teaches you about your special area of work but you often know little about what other providers bring to the complete treatment plans of patients. You need to understand the duties of each team member to work together effectively, increasing your own skills as duties often overlap. As part of the team, you come to understand and appreciate the roles of physicians, nurses, nursing assistants, social workers, physical therapists and administrators as you communicate and work together in the best interests of the patient.

### **Reduced Errors**

Anyone can have a bad day, even surgeons and highly trained nurses. One of the benefits of working together as a team is that team members can communicate when they perceive a mistake is about to be made. To that end, every participant on the team must feel comfortable enough to speak up when they see something being done improperly. According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, 75 percent of close calls and adverse medical outcomes result from poor communication. When team members work closely together, they learn to overcome barriers to effective communication among all team members, including the nurse's aide, the social worker, the patient and the doctor.

### **Reduced Stress**

Professionals in the medical field often undergo enormous stress from the patients who expect answers and healing as well as the lack of sufficient staffing in many hospitals. Hospital staff become disenchanted with their work when they continually must train new hires because of low retention rates. Caregivers become stressed when they cannot communicate with a decision maker regarding patients' care. Active teamwork policies in a hospital promote increased morale among the staff and subsequently reduce turnover.

### **Common Barriers to Inter Professional Healthcare Team Work**

#### **1. Organizational barriers**

- Lack of knowledge and appreciation of the roles of other health professionals
- The need to make compelling arguments for team building to senior decision-makers
- Lack of outcomes research on collaboration
- Financial and regulatory constraints

#### **2. Barriers at the team level**

- Lack of a clearly stated, shared, and measurable purpose
- Lack of training in inter professional collaboration
- Role and leadership ambiguity
- Team too large or too small
- Team not composed of appropriate professionals

#### **3. Barriers faced by individual team members**

- Split loyalties between team and own discipline
- Multiple responsibilities and job titles
- Gender, race, or class-based prejudice
- Persistence of a defensive attitude
- Reluctance to accept suggestions from team members representing other professions; and
- Lack of trust in the collaborative process

#### **4. Barriers for independent providers**

- Accustomed to assuming total responsibility;
- Unease with allowing others to be involved in clinical decision-making;
- Discomfort with performance review by team members of different professional backgrounds;
- Legal liability for others' decisions; and
- Dilution of traditional one-to-one relationship with patient/client.

### **Overcoming Barriers**

- Agree on unifying philosophy centered around primary care of the patient/client and the community
- Develop a commitment to the common goal of collaboration
- Learn about other professions



- respect others' skills and knowledge
- Establish positive attitudes about own profession
- Develop trust between members
- Be willing to share responsibility for patient/client care
- Establish a mechanism for negotiation and re-negotiation of goals and roles over time
- Establish method for resolving conflicts between team members; and
- Be willing to work continuously on overcoming barriers.

### **Strategies to Boost Nurse Teamwork**

Several strategies can be employed to mitigate the teamwork obstacles in a hospital setting. They include: creating smaller teams, establishing consistent schedules, creating all 8- or 12-hour shifts, decreasing turnover and absences, offering rewards and incentives, and physically clustering teams.

#### **Smaller Teams**

The creation of teams with fewer members would greatly reduce the number of interactions. In one hospital, where the senior author consulted, smaller teams were created by dividing a 40-bed medical unit into 4 smaller units, each made up of 10 beds. Staff agreed to work for a period of 1 year on 1 of the 10 bed units with the same staff. This meant that they not only worked with the same people during their shift, but they also consistently handed off to the same staff members. This restructuring reduced the number of different people the staff had to work with by 75%.

#### **Consistent Schedule**

Each group of staff would be scheduled for the same days and the same weekends. Although there would be exceptions when staff needs special days off, in general, it would greatly reduce the number of different people they worked with.

#### **8-Hour or 12-Hour Shifts**

Another issue that greatly increases the number of different team members worked with is the mixture of 8- and 12-hour shifts. Staff leave at 3 PM and unless another 8-hour staff member comes in at that time to relieve her, her patients have to be redistributed among the other 12-hour staff. This also happens again at 7 PM when the 12-hour staff come on and at 11 PM when the evening shift staff leave. Obviously, instituting all 8-hour or all 12- hour shifts would limit the number of required new interactions.

#### **Rewards and Recognition**

Creating a meaningful, cost-effective reward system is both one of the most important and one of the most frustrating challenges facing nursing leaders. Appropriate rewards for team- work should be empowering, not manipulative, work synergistically with intrinsic motivation, produce energy to achieve even more, and make team members feel good about their current and past accomplishment.

#### **Cluster Teams**

Another strategy to enhance teamwork would be to create teams within the patient unit based on geography. Closer physical proximity would increase the ability of team members to determine assistance and consultation needs of other staff members and to obtain help and advice when needed.

#### **How to Apply Teamwork**

Practical tips for health-care professionals to practice team work:

- Always introduce yourself to the team
- Read back/close the communication loop
- State the obvious to avoid assumptions
- Ask questions, check and clarify
- Delegate tasks to specific people, not to the air
- Clarify your role
- Use objective (not subjective) language.

#### **Conclusion**

In order for hospitals and primary care practices to survive, the culture of teamwork must be supported. The essence of this teamwork will be a collaborative environment in which advanced care practitioners, bedside nurses, and others work and



share in the process and systems of care. Leadership is needed at all levels of the healthcare system to implement teamwork that will contribute to the health of people. Given the complexity of the healthcare system, the creation, implementation, and maintenance of collaborative care teams requires a significant long-term commitment.

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