

Feature



Team Support and Development:

Building a Better Healthcare Team for Patient Safety

All healthcare practitioners are becoming more aware of the impact of effective team communication and interprofessional collaboration on quality patient care and safety. Successful interprofessional practice (IPP) is based on collaboration, communication, and teamwork. IPP integrates the knowledge and expertise of members from different healthcare professions to accomplish common goals (Bajnok, MacDonald, and Puddester, in press). While the focus in the past has been on the traditional healthcare professions, such as medicine, nursing, physiotherapy, social work, it is clear that all members of the healthcare team have a critical part to play in the patient's journey through the healthcare system – including those in laboratory and technical support roles.

are solutions to this barrier. Such solutions adopt the premise that teams can work effectively together if they know and respect each others' skills and areas of contribution, and recognize that, depending on the issue, leadership may change and rest with the healthcare professional most knowledgeable about the issue. The key to such mature approaches to leadership is first of all an effective team that knows and respects each other and their formal roles and areas of skill and expertise.

Clearly healthcare staff must learn how to share their roles and goals and work together in teams. Unfortunately, while this goal is given lip service in our healthcare organizations, and education programs are beginning to provide interprofessional education, the supports are not generally available in the workplace to enable qual-

healthcare costs, and improved job satisfaction (Baggs, 1997; Hendel et al., 2007). All patient errors and adverse events in healthcare come with a price tag whether it is in human life, quality of life, staff satisfaction, or actual dollar costs. The business case for spending dollars to develop and enable effective team functioning, so necessary for quality care and prevention of system failures, can clearly be made.

In order for interprofessional practice (IPP) to be adopted across all healthcare settings, current healthcare professionals need support to consistently adopt a team approach to clinical care. The purpose of the Teams of Interprofessional Staff (TIPS) project, funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, was to explore whether interprofessional team development for practicing healthcare professionals makes a difference in team functioning, team member satisfaction, ability to work effectively both individually and as a team, and improved patient well-being (Bajnok et al., in press). The TIPS Project consisted of five healthcare teams from across Ontario participating in three, two day face-to-face interprofessional educational (IPE) sessions over an eight month period, with the opportunity to apply 'learnings' in the practice setting between each session. A formative and summative evaluation was conducted that helped identify what elements of the program supported enhanced team functioning as well as the impact of the project on both clinical and staff outcomes.

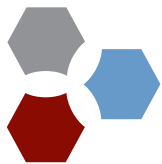
One of the TIPS teams included nurses, a physician, and laboratory and technical staff, all working together in an emergency care setting in an Ontario acute care hospital. The teams' mandate from the organization was to demonstrate increased client centered care through effective team functioning. This team was unique in the project due to its inclusion of more non-traditional team members as well as its focus on teamwork throughout their home organization

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In effective healthcare team functioning, each member of the team works within their area of expertise, while integrating the expertise of other health professionals, to achieve the patient goals using a collaborative team approach (Casimiro, 2009). Given the growing empirical evidence that poor interprofessional relationships can have an adverse effect on healthcare outcomes, (Beckmann et al., 1996; Baggs et al., 1992; Caldwell et al., 2006; Stark et al., 2002), it is imperative that the culture in healthcare institutions change to support, promote, and expect collaboration, teamwork, and communication among all members of the healthcare team (Bajnok et al., in press; RNAO, 2007). While many of the challenges to interprofessional practice revolve around team leadership, with historic power differentials in healthcare usually dictating physician dominance, there

ity team functioning on a day-to-day basis. These supports, that do have budget implications, include time and space for team meetings, acknowledgement of effective team outcomes, education for practicing professionals to gain a mindset about team practice, opportunities for evaluating team functioning, and ongoing team communication and development activities (RNAO, 2007). The RNAO Healthy Work Environment Best Practice Guideline focused on effective teamwork, provides the evidence and critical recommendations for organizations, teams, and individuals to foster quality team care. While there are upfront costs for such team supports, we do know communication amongst health team members is one of the key elements of patient safety (Baker and Ross, 2004). Evidence indicates that collaboration and teamwork lead to improved patient care, reduced

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that incorporated all members of the team in healthcare. Through a variety of activities, carried out in their home organization, such as development of a video featuring all the staff who play a role in the patients' journey from admission to discharge, and job shadowing wherein the role of all members of the team, including the technicians, were shared and better understood by all staff, this TIPS team clearly communicated the contribution of each team member to quality patient care. The unique skills of those in laboratory and technical roles, in particular, were highlighted resulting in other professionals gaining a greater understanding of how these roles contribute to effective and safe patient care.

The formative evaluation of the TIPS program enabled TIPS teams to help shape the program so that it better acknowledged all healthcare workers as members of the team, and reinforced the critical role of leadership in healthcare in understanding, expecting, enabling, supporting, and sustaining effective teamwork among all healthcare staff (Bajnok et al., in press). The summative evaluation reinforced the importance of providing formal development opportunities for practicing healthcare staff to assist them to learn how better to work in teams. The evaluation also highlighted key elements that make such professional development in teamwork successful, including expert faculty representing all types of healthcare staff, flexibility of the program to respond to the varied needs of practicing professionals, sharing of new knowledge as well as provision of opportunities for application of information with feedback, and facilitators that can role model teamwork and mutual respect. In addition, the evaluation reinforced the value to all teams of team development tools and strategies, such as team agreements, meeting tips, team evaluation strategies, how to have critical conversations and conflict resolution. Finally all teams reported on the positive impact their enhanced team functioning had on the home organization, their team effectiveness, their individual role satisfaction and perceived patient outcomes (Bajnok et al., in press).

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In conclusion, numerous evidence-based documents (*HealthForceOntario*, 2007; RNAO, 2007; CHSRF, 2006) strongly support teamwork as being the key to quality care for patients and quality of work life for all healthcare staff. As this evidence is slowly being addressed in our healthcare workplaces, we must be careful to focus on the entire team of healthcare professionals and staff, all of whom make a difference for patient, staff, and organizational outcomes. ♦

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