

Chapter 59

Factors Enabling Communication– Based Collaboration in Interprofessional Healthcare Practice: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The healthcare system has moved from autonomous practice to a cross-disciplinary interprofessional team-based approach in which communication for collaborative care is vital. Ineffective communication contributes to the team's inability to work collaboratively and significantly increases the possibilities of mistakes occurring in the delivery of patient care. So, effective communication for collaborative care becomes necessary for ensuring patient safety. This paper aims to advance our understandings of current communication-based collaborative healthcare practices. Specifically, it explores the factors enabling communication-based inter-professional practice. A qualitative study was selected for obtaining real life experiences of healthcare professionals. Twenty-five participants participated in the study, and the descriptive interview method was used to obtain qualitative data. The enabling factors were grouped into five main themes: communication, coordination, cooperation, trust, and collaboration. Quotes from the participants are presented to augment the interpretation and enhanced description of the enabling factors. Managerial implications, areas for future research, and limitations are given besides the conclusions of the study.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the modern healthcare system, healthcare provision has shifted from that of autonomous practice to interprofessional team based approach which involves multiple professionals with different educational background, training and expertise, working on behalf of patients, sharing a common goal (Woods et al., 2011). In providing high-quality care to patients, professionals have to interact with a number of other healthcare professionals cultivating relationships using best communication practices ensuring better patient outcomes. Patients receive safer and higher-quality care when healthcare professionals work as a team and communicate effectively while they practice. Effective interprofessional communication is not only important for patient care, but it is an essential element of healthcare environment. Ineffective communication contributes to the professional team's inability to collaboratively work together (Thomas et al., 2004). Healthcare professionals cannot provide safer care for patients without correct information and so communication has life-and-death implications (Haeuser & Preston, 2005).

The past research has found the communication of healthcare professionals as highly variable and often ineffective due to individual differences in culture and environment (McKinney, Barker, Davis, & Smith 2005; Pearce, 2003; Shorter, 1995). In the complex healthcare environment, poor communication and collaboration among health professionals significantly increases the possibilities of mistakes occurring in the delivery of patient-care, medication-error-related deaths, wrong-site surgeries and increased staff turnover (Woods et al., 2011; Spath, 2005; Anonymous, 2005). So, clear and precise communication among professionals becomes necessary for ensuring patient safety and safe patient environment (Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, 2004).

The objective of this paper is to advance our understandings of current practices by examining the communication processes used in interprofessional collaborative practice in healthcare settings. Specifically, the paper explores the ways in which health professionals can communicate more effectively and identify the factors enabling communication-based inter-professional collaborative practice in complex environment. The remaining part of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 documents the research methodology followed for this study; Section 3 shows the qualitative findings; Section 4 discusses the managerial implications of this study followed by the areas of future research; and Section 5 gives the limitations and the concluding remarks.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to improve our understandings of current communication based collaboration used in inter-professional practice in healthcare settings. In other words, the research study is intended to deepen the understandings of communication based collaboration by obtaining real life experiences of healthcare professionals. Since the study aimed for straight descriptions of the phenomena of communication-based inter-professional practice and collaboration, the qualitative descriptive study method was chosen for the research design (Sandelowski, 2000). The qualitative study was selected as it is a process used to examine the lived experiences of healthcare professionals in the field; and it provides a comprehensive summary of real life experiences in terms of events. To know and understand a phenomenon, facts about that phenomenon is required. The facts could be in the form of events or experiences which are descriptive in nature. These descriptions depend on the describer's perceptions and sensitiveness of the described events (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Based on

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