



Health Policy Snapshot

Workforce

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What can be done to encourage more interprofessional collaboration in health care?

Takeaways:

- Collaboration between doctors, nurses and other health care providers—known as interprofessional collaboration—is not the norm in health care today.
- Interprofessional collaboration holds promise for reducing medical errors, improving the quality of care and meeting the needs of diverse populations.
- We can increase interprofessional collaboration by educating doctors, nurses and other health professionals together, and by retraining providers to work together.

Overview

Most health care providers today were educated in silos with only those from their own profession. Few were trained to work as part of integrated teams. But when providing patient care, they must interact with providers from other professions to share information, execute quality and safety checks and help patients understand and comply with treatment plans.

Research has long suggested that collaboration improves coordination, communication and, ultimately, the quality and safety of patient care. It utilizes both the individual and collective skills and

experience of team members, allowing them to function more effectively and deliver a higher level of services than each would working alone. To date, this kind of care has not been widely implemented outside of discrete settings such as intensive care units, trauma and transplant teams.

THE CURRENT LACK OF COLLABORATION

Our health care system today is fraught with errors. Both the human and financial costs are enormous. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that, at any given time, about one in every 20 patients has an infection related to their hospital care. On average, one in seven Medicare beneficiaries is harmed in the course of their care, costing the government an estimated \$4.4 billion every year¹.

In part, this is because providers do not function in teams. Doctors and specialists do not confer, tests are repeated and test results are not shared, and care is not coordinated in ways that protect patients during transitions between different settings of care, such as hospital to nursing home or home. There is increasing evidence that coordinating care by assigning teams of providers can help reduce medical errors² and improve quality³, as well as help providers provide patient-centered, higher quality care to an increasingly diverse patient population⁴.

COLLABORATION IN EDUCATION

Effective collaboration begins early, as providers are being educated. The Institute of Medicine in 2010

recommended that nurses should be educated with doctors and other health professionals both as students and later.⁵

In 2011, partnership of health professional education associations known as the Interprofessional Education Collaborative recommended that all future health professionals should be taught to:

- **assert values and ethics of interprofessional practice** by placing the interests, dignity, and respect of patients at the center of health care delivery, and embracing the cultural diversity and differences within health care teams
- **leverage the unique roles and responsibilities of interprofessional partners** to appropriately assess and address the health care needs of patients and populations served
- **communicate with patients, families, communities and other health professionals**
- **perform effectively in various team roles** to deliver patient- or population-centered care that is safe, timely, efficient, effective and equitable

Currently only about a quarter of residency programs in family medicine also include nurse practitioners. Some of these programs also offer training for physician assistants, pharmacists, podiatrists, social workers and other professions.⁶

COLLABORATION IN PATIENT CARE

To target health care professionals after they have completed their training, hospitals, primary care providers and other health care organizations should reeducate providers. In 2006, the U.S. Department of Defense and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality within the Department of Health and Human Services teamed up to provide a tool to do this: Team Strategies and Tools to Enhance Performance and Patient Safety (TEAMSTEPPS). This evidence-based program aims to improve communication and teamwork skills.⁷ The American Institutes for Research and several partners are expanding the

system with a national training and support network called the National Implementation of TEAMSTEPPS Project. It includes five resource centers that conduct master trainer training courses for health care agencies.

The Affordable Care Act advances the concept of interprofessional collaboration. It promotes a variety of models that depend on integrated teams of providers to deliver superior care, such as accountable care organizations, Medicare Independence at Home demonstration projects and Medicaid Health Homes.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- [*Team-Based Competencies: Building a Shared Foundation for Education and Clinical Practice \(Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, ABIM Foundation and RWJF\)*](#)
- [*Core Competencies for Interprofessional Collaborative Practice \(IPEC\)*](#)
- [*The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health \(IOM\)*](#)
- [*Educating Interprofessional Learners for Quality, Safety and Systems Improvements \(Journal of Interprofessional Care\)*](#)

¹ <http://www.healthcare.gov/center/programs/partnership>

² <http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/171/7/678>

³ <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0899588505000043>

⁴ <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/springer/nmeas/2003/00000011/00000001/art00004>

⁵ <http://www.thefutureofnursing.org/IOM-Report>

⁶ <http://www.ama-assn.org/resources/doc/medical-schools/sms-a09-interprof-coll.pdf>

⁷ <http://teamstepps.ahrq.gov/index.htm>