

Interprofessional Communication

Integrating evidence to enhance systems during a pandemic

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BACKGROUND: The COVID-19 pandemic placed challenges on interprofessional communication patterns among clinical care teams at a time when effective communication was greatly needed. The development of enhanced systems for communication that integrate the latest evidence and communication technologies can offer a solution to this crisis.

OBJECTIVES: This article provides a framework for ways in which nursing teams can develop evidence-based enhanced interprofessional communication systems during a pandemic.

METHODS: Based on communication models and related technologies, this article reviews strategies to enhance interprofessional communication. Two case studies are included that illustrate how nursing teams can enhance communication during a pandemic.

FINDINGS: To improve communication during a pandemic, clinicians can incorporate interprofessional communication models in clinical practice and apply enhanced communication strategies.

KEYWORDS

interprofessional communication; COVID-19; eHealth; pandemic; huddle

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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HEALTHCARE WORKERS IN CLINICAL PRACTICE faced numerous challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hospitals and healthcare systems rapidly developed new protocols, created new workflows, and deployed new technologies to meet these growing challenges. Oncology clinicians diligently continued to deliver cancer care for a highly vulnerable patient population while also often providing care to those most critically ill with the virus. In this context, interprofessional collaboration was challenged by increased demands placed on each member of the clinical team, as well as the physical distance created by remote work for some. In addition, clinical practice updates were at times delivered in silos to members within each discipline, which has the potential to cause confusion when working in interprofessional clinical care settings (Weller et al., 2014).

According to a report from Joint Commission International (2018), 80% of events in health care are rooted in ineffective communication among healthcare providers. Routine communication among the interprofessional team is recommended by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality as a means of maintaining safety and reducing errors in the healthcare setting (Shaikh, 2020). In cancer care in particular, research has demonstrated the positive effect that strong interprofessional communication can have on patient outcomes and the patient experience (Tremblay et al., 2017). This article reviews the importance of interprofessional collaboration during a crisis and provides a framework for how nursing teams can help to foster and maintain optimal interprofessional communication amid a worldwide pandemic.

Background

The term “interprofessional,” sometimes termed interdisciplinary in the literature (Janssen et al., 2017), refers to collaboration between a group of professionals to accomplish shared goals. Interprofessional communication structures consist of team members, policies and procedures, and communication practices. In health care, interprofessional communication is largely focused on care planning, information exchange, teaching, decision making, negotiation, and leadership (Kuziemy et al., 2009).

Effective interprofessional communication is reliant on a positive workplace culture, with relationships based on mutual trust and respect among