Key Areas that Teams Must Address[1]

Having decided to implement an interprofessional collaborative team model, we need to navigate the team development phases, and achieve the definition of an effective team. This requires that teams address several key issues. Moreover, an examination of these five questions can help you understand issues that may be helping, or hindering, the performance of your team. The following summarizes the key areas that teams must address.

1. **What is the team's direction?** Here the team must establish its common purpose and goals. These are critical as it gives the team a sense of purpose and provides direction. Remember that teams should periodically revisit their common purpose and goals, both to track success as well as to ensure that they are still relevant.

2. **Who performs which tasks and with whom?** Here teams must determine the key tasks and who is responsible for which tasks. Remember, teams are made up of people with complementary skills who have mutual accountability for the end result. Thus, while people may have clearly assigned roles, there must be some flexibility here as people will need to 'pitch in' and cross traditional roles in order to perform effectively. As such, it may be more beneficial to develop effective ways of sharing some of the responsibilities and tasks rather than only assigning them to a single person. In terms of roles, it is helpful to consider the following:
   o role clarity vs. ambiguity (are expectations clearly defined?);
   o role compatibility vs. conflict (do roles conflict?); and
   o role overload (can an individual meet all expectations?).

   The decisions of who does what can be guided by provider availability, level of training, or member preferences. As with the setting of goals, it is important to periodically review and revise member roles as necessary.

   Pitfalls arising from lack of role clarification:

   o new members are confused regarding what is expected of them and what they can expect from others;
   o increased conflicts between team members;
   o crises arise when members assume that someone else was responsible for handling the situation; and
   o team decisions are not carried out effectively.

3. **What mechanisms are needed to facilitate high team performance?** Teams must establish clear guidelines concerning issues such as conflict resolution, sharing of critical information and leadership/decision making.

   Conflict Resolution. Given the mixture of skills and professional backgrounds, and the complexity of interdisciplinary collaboration, a diversity of views and differences of opinion are inevitable. It is important to recognize, however, that conflict is both necessary and desirable in order for the team to grow and thereby develop greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Sharing of information. To provide effective, coordinated care, a team must have an efficient mechanism for exchange of information. At the simplest level, this requires the time, space, and regular opportunity for members to meet and discuss patient cases.

An ideal system for communication would include:
- o a well-designed record system;
- o a regularly scheduled forum for members to discuss patient management issues;
- o a regular forum for discussion and evaluation of team function and development, as well as related interpersonal issues; and
- o a mechanism for communicating with the external systems within which the team operates.

4. **Leadership and Decision-Making.** An emerging pattern in many primary health care teams involves equal participation and responsibility on the part of team members with "shifting" leadership determined by the nature of the problem to be solved. Emphasis by the team on "health care" rather than the more narrow focus of "medical care" broadens the roles and responsibilities of non-physician providers.

In developing a mechanism for making decisions, the team must address the following questions:
- o what needs to be decided?
- o who should be involved in the process?
- o what decision-making process should be used?
- o who will be responsible for carrying out the decision?
- o who needs to be informed about the decision?

It would be unnecessary to require every member of the team to be present and to contribute to every decision of the team. Clearly, decision will be made by a subset of team members in a time-efficient manner. Effective decision-making within the context of a collaborative team requires a balance between involving the fewest number of members without compromising the validity of the decision.

What types of team member behaviors foster high work accomplishments?

Knowledge Skills

The team member should be able to:

- Identify members of the primary health care team required for a particular clinical problem;
- Understand role of patient, family, and community as members of health care team;
- Understand the role of primary health care in providing health care to the community;
- Describe the interprofessional collaborative practice model of primary care;
- Describe the unique skills and special knowledge of other members of health care team;
- Identify the different attitudes and philosophies that distinguish professional subcultures;
- Identify collaborative skills that will benefit patient/clients; and

- Describe methods and limitations of evaluating outcomes in collaborative care.

Practice Skills

The individual should be able to:

- Engage in active listening;
- Communicate effectively with other team members (including patients and families) and clearly document involvement in patient/client care;
- Determine goals of treatment together with other members of team;
- Assume leadership responsibilities of the team as appropriate;
- Take on responsibility for an area within the scope of the team;
- Demonstrate sufficient assertiveness to hold others to their responsibilities;
- Refer patients to other team members as appropriate;
- Demonstrate a supportive, respectful attitude toward other members' skills in dealing with patient/client problems; and
- Be willing to engage in conflict resolution between team members.

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[1]Grant RW, Finnocchio LJ, and the California Primary Care Consortium Subcommittee on Interdisciplinary Collaboration. (1995). Interdisciplinary Collaborative Teams in Primary Care: A Model Curriculum and Resource Guide. San Francisco, CA: Pew Health Professions Commission, 1995.