

Session 5

Inter-Professional Relationship

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Introduction

As healthcare professionals, it is important to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships with other professionals. Three important factors such as scientific principles, specific communication skills and strategies, and creative application of self in professional relationship are necessary for establishing and maintaining inter-professional- relationship. Combination of all of these components is necessary to understand and interact with each other professionals effectively and maintain inter professional relationships.

In our day-to-day life, when we come across with a difficult situation, we look for somebody's help or seek advice. When there is somebody who understands you, who cares for you, who supports you, things will become easy for you. Within the health care-system a healthcare professional has to work collaboratively with peer professional groups and different groups of other categories of professionals for advice, support and care. In achieving care related goals, healthcare professionals have to work with each other

professionals for work related achievements, personal support and for educational support.

Traditionally, there was a gap between different categories of workers in the health care settings. The role each of them had to was decided in a hierarchical way. Now that has changed considerably. When providing care, all members of the health care team have to work together, in a collaborative manner. Without a good interpersonal relationship, this will be difficult to achieve. When working, each professional has a unique contribution towards the patient. This is because every one needs and expects acceptance and self-worth.

It is true that in some settings, each one has to work in isolation very often to accomplish the professional responsibility. In such instances, they have limited opportunities to interact with others. However, if one person is appreciating the value of the work done by the other, he/she gets a feeling of satisfaction. If the work is not appreciated and is not respected, the inter-professional relationship will be threatened. At times, this reaction may become a barrier to establish good communication between professionals. Later, it may lead to a conflicting situation among the group. Therefore, maintaining a good professional relationship is essential for a healthy working environment.

5.1 Inter-Professional Relationship

These relationships could be among colleagues of the same profession or with other professionals. In the health care system, every person is expected to be accepted and respected. They want to support the patient/client and others in providing care. While respecting and accepting others, they expect a similar way of treatment as returns. Collegiality is a crucial aspect to provide quality nursing/ health care. Inadequacy of communication has a

serious impact on professional-collegial relationships and professional-professional relationships. Northouse and Northouse (1992) identified three barriers for effective communication between professionals. Those are role stress, lack of inter professionals understanding and autonomy struggles.

Activity 1



Mr. Namal was suffering from high fever for two days. When he met the doctor for the follow-up visit, the doctor asked him to do a full blood count test. So Mr. Namal went to the medical laboratory scientist with the prescription. There was a big crowd and the medical laboratory scientist was very busy. Medical laboratory scientist took the blood sample and asked Mr. Namal to come after about 2 hours to get the report. Mr. Namal took the lab report and went to meet the doctor. The doctor was confused after going through the blood report and he got to know that the report is incorrect. The Medical laboratory scientist had given a wrong lab report to Mr. Namal which belonged to Mr. Nalin.

1. As a medical laboratory scientist how would you respond to Mr. Namal?
2. As a medical laboratory scientist what could you do to minimize these kinds of incidents?

5.1.1 Role Stress

Sometimes the healthcare professionals' experience is that their work demands are unable to be fulfilled due to the shortage of staff. In such situations, healthcare professionals feel a sense of pressure developing within them. Role stress occurs due to role conflict and role overload (Northouse & Northouse, 1992). Healthcare professionals are trained in their schools or universities to function as educated healthcare professionals. When they enter health care settings, they may be exposed to a different situation from what they have expected. For example, when a Pharmacist or MLS educated to be a healthcare professional in a non-specialized unit is appointed to a special care unit, he/she becomes stressed because the role of the healthcare professional in these settings is different from what has been expected. It could be a shock for him/her until he/she gets adjusted to the settings, roles and responsibilities. This was described as a "role conflict" situation.

The staffs already working in those units expect more than what these newly appointed individuals are capable of doing. Automatically, disapproval and disconfirmation occur. Then, the barriers to communication increases. As a result, the relationship between these professionals becomes more and more unhealthy. It is the responsibility of both parties to understand each other. If the new one communicates his/ her inexperience on the subject, the senior one could have responded in a better manner. On the other hand, if the senior professional checks with the junior one's capability of fulfilling the particular task before assigning a new task, problems may not arise. Not only new healthcare professionals, experienced healthcare professionals also may face this kind of role conflict. With the seniority, they are given more administrative responsibilities which may not be related to the professional role. Then, their efficiency in providing quality care is reduced. With these stresses, their job satisfaction deteriorates.

The other reason that increases role stress is the existing work load. Currently, Sri Lankan healthcare professionals are overloaded with work. For example, the persisting shortage of healthcare professionals has made most of them work overtime. When doing routine normal work during day or night, they have to meet countless demands from patients, visitors and other professionals. When there are a great number of demands to meet within a limited period of time, gradually, they will decrease the ability to cope with them. When working with other professionals their tension increases further.

When they work under tension, they are more prone to develop conflicting situations, which will be projected on others. Ultimately, most of the health care team members may not be able to meet the needs demanded by patients, demands of the settings, and demands of the others. This is more common among healthcare professionals working with many other health care team members of different professionals in the same unit. The ultimate result of the tension that has been developed due to work overload is the

unhappy professional- professional relationships. When it happens, they start to avoid each other, which will further widen the barrier. If both parties communicate with each other seeking collaborative support, the tension as well as the unhappy relationships could be avoided.

When working as a team, the situation is different. Goal achievement becomes an easy task when the members of the team work collaboratively and dutifully without being isolated. Isolation results in unmet demands of patient care, which is an impact of conflicts that occur due to stress. When working collaboratively, two or more people work together to achieve a common goal to solve a problem or to achieve a task. The responsibility is shared by all. When one group of professionals develop a collaborative relationship with another group of healthcare professionals, each of the members of the team understands every other's role clearly. When the team members understand one another's professional role, it will be easy to implement quality care. In a team, everybody focuses attention on one's step towards goal achievement. If one step is missed the next person could identify and communicate it to the former one.

In order to develop collaborative relationships, healthcare professionals other co-workers and patients need to communicate properly and effectively. All of them should have mutual respect for one another because each role is unique. Sharing relevant information honestly with the team is essential to build respect and to trust one another. Since nurses comprise the group of professionals who have contact with patients, during their stay. In the hospital, even other healthcare professionals do have contact with patients at different times, it is better to share the important information with other healthcare professionals which has an impact on patient care. Therefore, you must be sensitive to identify such situations and act wisely using proper communication.



Activity 2

Examine a situation where a role conflict occurred with a colleague of yours.

Describe the situation.

1. How did that incident influence a role stress in your colleague?
2. What were the behaviours you observed?
3. Discuss how role stress affects the care given to patients in your unit.

5.1.2 Inter- professional Understanding

Members of the health care team need to understand each other's roles and responsibilities to provide better collaborative care. However, there is no such understanding among different categories of health professionals. Most of the members think that "they are the masters" "they are the only group that has authority". If you have a closer look, most of them are not aware of their domains. When they are not aware of own domain, what about the awareness of domains of other categories of health care professionals.

One reason for this is the professional education. During the professional education they learn about their own field in isolation but very little exposure to other's professional education and roles. (Northhouse & Northhouse, 1992). The other reason is, not recognizing each other's roles and responsibilities. For these reasons, one may overestimate or underestimate the other person or the other professions. As a result, the expectation they have from the other person on patient care may not be the role or a responsibility of the second person. These things lead to unhappiness and frustrations. Most of the time, healthcare professionals have this unpleasant experience when working with some medical professionals. For example, since most of them do not know the real role and responsibilities of each of the healthcare professionals they expect many non-professional jobs from others.

In contrast, some of the work done in the past by one category of professionals has been taken over by another category as a result of expansion of roles. Such situations made the first category of professionals

to think the second group is trying to take over or to control over the first group of professionals. This is role over-lapping. This was at times between nursing and paramedics, nursing and medical professionals. Now it has increased because all the other health care team members also look forward to expand their professional roles and responsibilities by means of professional developments via higher education.

All these conflicts arise due to lack of inter-professional understanding. Therefore, it is necessary to have proper communication among different groups of professionals in the health care team. It should commence from the beginning of professional training. When they understand the roles and responsibilities of each of the professionals in the health care settings, each of them will use their own expertise in a better way without being a threat to other professionals. Every professional in the healthcare team need to know about their own strengths and weaknesses of interpersonal communication. At the same time, they need to identify the same with others who are working with them in the healthcare team.

The communication strategies need to be changed according to the individual. Correct knowledge about the situation is also important in communication. Some members may have adamant opinions that may create issues. In such situations, the professional need to negotiate with the other. During interaction, the professional should be a flexible and careful listener with an open-mind. When there is proper inter-professional understanding, team work is really easy. Then, corporation and collaboration, that enhances mutual support and helping relationship, will be evident. Fry (2008) defined cooperation as the “active participation with others to obtain quality care for patients” (p.172).

Activity 3

1. Observe your practice area to identify the type of relationships among different professional groups.



2. Describe the nature of one of the relationships between you and one other professional in the team.
3. Do you think that they have maintained a healthy communication to achieve your goals of patient care?
4. Do you think that there is a lack of understanding of issues regarding health-care among professionals in your health-care team?
5. What made you to think so? Provide reasons.
6. Discuss how could you support to establish a healthy environment for everybody to work comfortably.

5.1.3 Autonomy

Autonomy, which is a principle of ethics, is another important aspect that has influence on relationships of one group of healthcare, professionals with another group of health care professionals. Every health care team member does not have the same level of autonomy in practice. Historically, medical professionals are given the authority to make decisions regarding care of a sick individual. All the other professionals in the health care team plays a role below the level of medical practitioners. Now education of healthcare professionals has changed. Healthcare professionals use critical thinking in developing their discipline based unique knowledge through scientific inquiry. For example, with the experience and knowledge, Pharmacists can identify possible drug-drug interactions by reviewing a prescription. Doctors diagnose patients and recommend treatments for the illness. Pharmacists on the other hand, continue and complete the recommended treatment with necessary medication. Medical Laboratory Technologists do laboratory tests and inform immediately when necessary.

Medicine, nursing, pharmacy, medical lab technology, radiology, etc. have their different roles regarding patient care. Healthcare professionals know what the best is for individual patients. They are competent healthcare professionals.

In order to maintain good professional relationships among professional groups, there should be better communication among professional groups.

Otherwise, collaborative team work may not continue effectively.

Therefore, health care institutions should take into consideration the factors that decrease communication as mentioned in this session

Activity 4

1. Identify the barriers to develop good communication practices between your colleagues and another group of professionals in your unit/ institution.
2. Analyze the factors related to those barriers.
3. As a responsible healthcare professional in this healthcare team, how could you address barriers of communication between the two groups?

Summary

There are times that one group of professionals develop unpleasant experience when working with other healthcare professionals. When there is a proper inter-professional understanding, team work is easy. Autonomy which is a principle of ethics is another important aspect that has influence on relationships among different groups of healthcare professionals. Currently, professional education of different healthcare professional groups has changed. Therefore, nobody can claim that they are superior category because each of them has their specific and unique role to play in the healthcare team for the benefit of patients. As professionals, we all should know what the best is for individual patient because you all are competent professionals.

As each group of professionals, you all need the authority to make decisions in relation to your professional practice related to patients. If the professional relationship among different groups of professionals is threatened the patient will be the ultimate sufferer. Different practices and substituting one category of professionals in place of another have a great impact on the autonomy of the professional practice. In order to maintain

good professional relationships among professional groups, there should have better and healthy communication among professional groups.

Objectives



- Discuss the importance of nurses developing relationships among health professionals
- State the nature of the Healthcare Professional relationship
- Describe the impact of role stress in maintaining relationships among professionals
- Discuss the need for interpersonal understanding in preventing conflicts within the work place
- Define the term autonomy
- Discuss strategies to maintain autonomy within the workplace.

Self-Assessment Questions



Reflect upon the practice of your professional group in the past to identify whether there were any unhealthy inter-professional relationships with another group.

1. What were the reasons for that?
2. What communication barriers existed?
3. How could you use inter-professional communication to avoid such circumstances?

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