

9 Ways to Improve Care Team Relationships

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It's well known that more and more medical care is being delivered by teams made up of physicians, nurses and other clinical professionals. With this in mind, intra-team cooperation and communication are becoming as crucial as diagnostic and treatment skills in giving quality care, maximizing the patient experience and saving lives. One study shows more than 70 percent of medical errors are rooted in poor interpersonal dynamics on care teams¹. In addition, dysfunction within groups has been shown again and again to lead to burnout, emotional distress, depression, substance abuse, reduced productivity and other problems among the team members themselves.



What opportunities exist for you to strengthen your patient care team relationships?

Many healthcare professionals report experiencing an increase in workloads and amplified stress and burnout. This environment doesn't leave time for individuals to get to know one another and build a trusting relationship. Worse yet, it only allows the minimal amount of interaction to "get the job done" which often leads to terse, clipped communication. This is fertile ground for misunderstandings and misperceptions of intent. Here are some ideas to help improve care team relationships:

9 Ways to Help Improve Care Team Relationships

1. **Check in with your care team regularly to assess their needs and interests in regard to working on your team.** Recognize the power differential in healthcare. It may be harder for some nurses or techs on your team to assert themselves than it is for you—so it is helpful if physicians and providers initiate this type of conversation.
2. **Make a personal connection with your team**—in an appropriate way—to help build relationships with your teammates. For example, exchange tidbits about your family, weekend plans or personal hobbies with team members.
3. **Share your successes and challenges as a team:** Recognize contributions and express gratitude to each other. Conversely, bring compassion to difficult times and practice forgiveness.
4. **Develop and use positive, respectful communication skills and emotional intelligence for motivating your team members.** Whether or not you are in a formal leadership role you can still leverage these skills to foster a cooperative and productive environment. You may find these are not skills you developed in medical school or in your practice. [Peer coaching](#) through VITAL WorkLife can be a great source of assistance in this area.
5. **Don't make assumptions.** Many physicians perceive themselves to have a greater investment in patient outcomes than the rest of their care team, while they themselves are often criticized for only concerning themselves with the clinical elements of care. It's important not to make negative assumptions about commitment or intent. Check your assumptions by asking questions. You are

likely to find more in common than you assumed and can build healthier interactions on that shared common ground.

6. **Encourage input.** In these challenging times in healthcare with higher acuity, decreased patient facing time and increased competition – you need all hands-on deck when it comes to accuracy and safety in practice. Encourage members of your care team to ask questions, make comments or offer suggestions. If you discourage input, even when you perceive it to be less useful in a particular situation, you may not get it when you need it.
7. **Use team huddles and debriefs.** Make a point to build in time for information exchange with your whole care team, such as team huddles and debriefs. Whether you are discussing an entire day or one case, a huddle gives you the opportunity to bring forward and discuss everyone’s needs and concerns related to patient care. With a debrief you can talk about what went well (always good for relationship building and offers positive reinforcement for practices you’d like to see continue) and also what you wish could have gone differently. For step by step information on creating effective huddles, check out the [AMA’s Steps Forward](#).
8. **Consider a Nurse-Physician Council.** [Healthcare Business & Technology](#) encourages the best practice of establishing a Nurse/Physician Council, which they describe as, “a group of nurse and physician leaders, who meet with a specific purpose—to improve and optimize nurse/physician relationships and communication.” Work with your leadership team to determine if this could be an option at your organization.
9. **Relationship building takes effort and needs to be intentional.** It is often not second nature, and many find they can benefit from coaching and counseling to make more rewarding and effective connections with people at work. You can contact VITAL WorkLife at 877.731.3949 or through the app to access your counseling and peer coaching resources today.

We Can Help

For assistance in strengthening communication with your nurses, care teams or leadership, contact VITAL WorkLife at **877.731.3949** to schedule an appointment with a [peer coach](#) or counselor from VITAL WorkLife who specialize in this area.

Sources:

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24304597>