INTRODUCTION

Health care organizations have learned from high-reliability organizations that function in complex, hazardous environments, such as aviation and the military, that a true team effort is critical to safely and efficiently reach the end goal. In these organizations, failures are often the result of collective systems failures, not of a single individual. It is teamwork that is essential to making these high-reliability organizations function with few mistakes over long periods of time. A team-centered focus can improve outcomes in health care.

THE HEALTH CARE TEAM

The health care team is comprised of all staff members tending to a patient—as well as the patient and his or her family. All have a shared primary goal of improving the health and well-being of the patient.

Characteristics of a high-performing collaborative team:

- **Common goal**: There should be a team-wide understanding of the goal and a shared perception of the situation or task. A team is considered effective when it consistently achieves its goals.

- **Cohesion**: Mutual respect and trust are necessary for team cohesion and unity. Effective teams coordinate efforts based on the current situation. The most effective teams feature a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives.

- **Clear roles**: A shared understanding of team structure, tasks and roles aligned with team member strengths are necessary for a high-functioning team.

- **Communication**: Open, consistent, concise, frequent and planned communication is paramount to the success of teams.

When these characteristics are *not* present, patient safety and health outcomes can be negatively impacted. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A patient scheduled for a procedure may not be appropriately prepared or may miss it completely causing delays in care</td>
<td>A medication contraindicated because of other medications or health status may be prescribed and taken by the patient</td>
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LEADING TEAMS

The effectiveness of a team is a result of the performance of the team as well as the leadership that guides it toward its shared goals. Anyone can be a leader.

Successful leaders possess the following key characteristics:

- Patient-centered
- Professional
- Selfless
- Emotionally intelligent
- Team player
- Effective communicator
- Patient advocate
- Systems thinker
- Data-driven decision maker
- Values-based visionary and strategist
- Culture and change enthusiast

INTERPROFESSIONAL TEAMS

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) identified the following core competencies that health professionals should have to be successful in dealing with the current complexities within the health system:

Provide patient-centered care:
- Identify, respect and care about patients’ differences, values, preferences and expressed needs
- Relieve pain and suffering
- Coordinate continuous care
- Listen to, clearly inform, communicate with and educate patients
- Share decision making and management
- Advocate disease prevention, wellness and promotion of healthy lifestyles

Employ evidence-based practice:
- Integrate best research with clinical expertise and patient values for optimum care
- Participate in learning and research activities to the extent feasible

Apply quality improvement:
- Identify errors and hazards in care
- Understand and implement basic safety design principles
- Understand and measure quality of care in terms of structure, process and outcomes
- Design and test interventions to change processes and systems of care to improve quality

Utilize informatics:
- Communicate, manage knowledge, mitigate error and support decision making using information technology

Work in interdisciplinary teams:
- Cooperate, collaborate, communicate and integrate care in teams to ensure that care is continuous and reliable

QUESTIONS TO ASK:
- What strengths can you bring to a high-performing collaborative team?
- If you have been selected for a team, do you understand the team’s goals, expectations and roles?
- Do you have suggestions for improving the effectiveness or communication standards of a current team?
- How might you develop leadership skills that would benefit an interprofessional team?