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Learning to Communicate in Multi-Disciplinary Teams

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Introduction
Innovative clinical research is dependent on multi-disciplinary teams to envision, design and implement complex research protocols. The varied backgrounds and approaches can also cause culture clashes within a team, when team members from one field have trouble communicating with team members from other fields. Those culture clashes can cause more than frustrations; they can be a serious detriment to team function.

Effective team communication enhances team functioning and can strengthen team members’ attachment and commitment to the team. Therefore, the goal of the presentation is to identify potential barriers to communication and team functioning and develop strategies for overcoming barriers and maximizing the benefits of a multi-disciplinary clinical research team.

Group dynamics and socialization
When considering group dynamics, keep in mind:
- A group has a separate life of its own
- A group has a structure of rules, roles and relations
- Groups assimilate new members through socialization

Teams don’t become teams overnight. And new team members seldom automatically fit into the new team. New members become a part of the group through socialization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group socialization</th>
<th>Supportive</th>
<th>Defensive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Prospective member</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. New member</td>
<td>Problem-Oriented</td>
<td>Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Spontaneity</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Full Member</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Neutrality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divergence</td>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>Superiority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Marginal member/Exit</td>
<td>Provisionalism</td>
<td>Certainty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Being part of a multi-disciplinary team
Being a part of team means learning to make decisions together. Team involvement in decision-making can have a long-term impact on the team.

Perceived involvement in decision-making impacts:
- Perceived team cohesiveness
- Satisfaction with team
- Satisfaction with team communication
- Desire to stay with the team roles
- Productivity

Improving team communication is about more than just feeling good about your team, but can also have a direct impact on productivity. But the task can be even more challenging in a multi-disciplinary environment.

There are advantages and disadvantages to working in a multi-disciplinary team.

Advantages
- A wide range of ideas
- Question your assumptions
- Guard against Groupthink

Possible disadvantages
- Culture clash
- High potential for misunderstanding
- Divergent problem-solving and management styles

When managing multi-disciplinary teams, it is especially important to be aware of the environment in which the exchange of ideas takes place. Foster a supportive rather than defensive environment.

How to make multi-disciplinary teams work

1. Overcoming barriers
- Disorganization
- Miscommunication
- Misunderstanding
- Lack of role evolution
- Let roles evolve
- Improper listening skills
- Improve listening skills
- Learn from and about fellow team members
- Reflective listening
- Lack of participation
- Highlight individual strengths
- Anticipate problems before they become problems

2. Improve the listening process
Hearing and listening are not the same thing.

Hearing is physiological. Listening is an active process of receiving, attending to and interpreting verbal and non-verbal messages.

Many workplace communication problems come down to a break in the listening process. Here are some steps to consider for both speakers and listeners.

Supportive
- Description
- Empathy
- Equality
- Provisionalism

Defensive
- Evaluation
- Control
- Strategy
- Neutrality
- Superiority
- Certainty

The Listening Process
- Attention
- Interpretation
- Evaluation
- Responding
- Storage and Retrieval

3. Encourage new ideas
When multiple disciplines are represented at the table, the possibilities of new ideas are endless. It is especially important to create an atmosphere where new and innovative ideas are encouraged.

When brainstorming, keep these principles in mind:
- Focus on quantity
- Withhold criticism
- Welcome unusual ideas
- Combine and improve ideas
- Make sure you have someone to write down all your ideas!

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