

I am a Nurse, and I Have Something to Say

Collaboration between nurses and physicians is essential in today's complicated health care environment. Even though collaboration is essential, it can be fraught with challenges. With physicians historically given more respect, credibility, greater financial compensation and often, unilateral power and support, the notion of collaboration is only now gaining traction in the medical community.

In order for collaboration to be successful, mutual respect, effective communication and emotional maturity are required of both disciplines. Both physicians and nurses need to have one central thing in common-providing optimal patient care, and each must realize that the other possesses information that the each other needs in order to best serve the patient's interests.

Nurses have much to offer in a collaborative effort. A nurse needs to project confidence and come from a place of strength where he/she enthusiastically contributes opinions based on knowledge and experience. When challenged, a nurse needs to be able to clearly communicate a point of view or decision regarding patient care even if it is different from other team members, including physicians. When disagreements inevitably arise, it is best to avoid the common traps, such as blaming others or lashing out when questioned; this behavior undermines credibility and damages rapport and trust. Since nurses have been undervalued for too long a time, a physician-nurse collaboration, where nurses play an active role, is a wonderful opportunity for nurses to shine and to change perceptions--educating others about care through a nurse's unique perspective.

Emotional intelligence and emotional maturity are essential elements in the collaborative process. Emotional intelligence means an ability to listen without judgment, consider another point of view as valid and negotiate without resentment. It is best if there is not an attachment to being 'right' as the primary outcome. Collaboration is much more satisfying and beneficial when it is done in a spirit of cooperation rather than an ego-driven exercise.

Patience is key to sustaining any type of collaboration. Maintaining patience and creative thinking will help smooth out the rough edges, particularly in the beginning of a collaborative process. Develop a system of communication to determine how communication is going to occur: email or in-person. When conflicts arise, address them in a collaborative way: get everyone's point of view and be prepared to negotiate a solution.

Not only is cultivating a culture of collaboration a value for patient care, it is also important for the medical team, because collaboration also builds skills and increases everyone's knowledge. When each discipline involved in collaborative care feels that they can freely exchange ideas, hypothesis, etc. without fear of judgment or retaliation, the workplace can become a place of continuous learning and produce a higher level of job satisfaction.

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