



# ABC of Patient Safety

*Learning and Working Together*

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## Working in Teams

### Teamwork and Patient Safety

Healthcare systems still suffer, as do patients, from an unacceptable level of adverse events (harm from care not from disease) which at least half can be prevented through system change. Breakdown in teamwork and communication is a constant root cause in most analyses of these adverse events. As a result, working in teams has evolved as an essential competency for all healthcare professions to acquire through their life-long education and training.

### Teams <sup>(1)</sup>

True teams are composed of at least two individuals working interdependently towards shared goals / objectives and who create time to reflect on their progress towards their achievement. In team-based healthcare, team members also work collaboratively with patients and their families in establishing shared goals / objectives that ensure safe quality care.

### Muti-Team Systems <sup>(2)</sup>

Care is interprofessional and involves work of multiple care teams. Patients along their care pathway encounter several teams of various professions each with their own roles and responsibilities. Healthcare is a multi-team system and attributing patient outcomes to a single care team is simplistic and ignores this complexity. In order to ensure safe integrated care, teams have to develop not only their intra-team skills but also their inter-team collaboration skills.

### Culture and Climate

It is important to have an organizational culture and local working climates that encourages staff to work in teams and share their experiences and concerns.

Positive organizational cultures are characterized by:

1. Clear missions;
2. Consistent policies;
3. Engaged staff;
4. Capacity to adapt and learn.

Positive working climates are characterized by:

1. Commitment to team approach in providing care;
2. Respecting and valuing contributions of team members regardless of profession or seniority;
3. Mutual accountability for team performance;
4. Acknowledgement of team member fallibility regardless of profession or seniority.

### Team Effectiveness <sup>(3)</sup>

Team effectiveness encompasses a set of different, but related, dimensions and therefore can mean different things to different people.

However, team effectiveness is usually related to the following:

1. **Team performance:** the extent to which the team is successful in achieving its goals, especially those that contribute to the accomplishment of the organization mission;
2. **Team member well-being:** referring to team members physical and mental health, professional development and growth;
3. **Team viability:** the likelihood the team will continue to work together and function effectively;
4. **Team innovation:** the extent to which the team develops and implements new and improved processes, products, and procedures;
5. **Inter-team cooperation:** capacity of the team in working with other teams within and without the organization.

### Team Building <sup>(4)</sup>

It is important when building teams that their composition reflects the multidisciplinary nature of healthcare and that team members from each profession respect and value the role and contribution of team members from other professions in order to ensure collaborative practice.

Building effective teams require the establishment of the following elements:

1. Team goals with measurable outcomes that are aligned with the organization mission;
2. Availability of clinical and administrative systems that support team members in the achievement of team goals;
3. Division of labour among team members including defining team tasks and assignment of roles;
4. Team members training in their roles and cross-training to ensure continuity of care in case of absences or increase workload;
5. Communication structures (meetings, routine communication, minute-to-minute communication) and processes (reflection, feedback, conflict resolution).

## References

1. Mitchell P, et al. Core principles and values of effective team-based health care. IOM. 2012.
2. Weaver SJ, et al. Improving patient safety and care quality. A multiteam system perspective. Research on Managing Groups and Teams. 2014;16:35-60.
3. West MA. Effective teamwork. Practical lessons from organizational research. Wiley-Blackwell. 2012.
4. Grumbach K, et al. Can healthcare teams improve primary care practice. JAMA. 2004;29:1246-51.



**WHO Collaborating Center  
on Patient Safety  
Interprofessional Education**



### ABC of Patient Safety

aims at

creating an awareness on  
patient safety;

providing a core knowledge on  
patient safety that is  
interprofessional;

encouraging communication  
between advocates of patient  
safety.

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## Team-Based Healthcare (1)

Team-based health care (TBS) is the provision of health services to individuals, families, and/or their communities by at least two health providers who work collaboratively with patients and their caregivers, to the extent preferred by each patient, to accomplish shared goals within and across settings to achieve coordinated, high-quality care.

### Values of TBC

The following 5 personal values are important for individuals to function well within healthcare teams:

**Honesty.** Honesty and transparency of aims, decisions, uncertainty, and mistakes are critical to continued improvement and for maintaining the mutual trust necessary for a high-functioning team.

**Discipline.** Team members carry out their roles and responsibilities with discipline, even when it seems inconvenient.

**Creativity.** Team members are innovative in tackling new or emerging problems. They see errors and unanticipated bad outcomes as potential opportunities to learn and improve.

**Humility.** Team members recognize that they are human and will make mistakes regardless of profession and seniority. Hence, they rely on each other to help recognize and avert failures.

**Curiosity.** Team members are dedicated to reflecting upon the lessons learned in the course of their daily activities and using those insights for continuous improvement of the functioning of the team.

### Principles of TBC

Each health care team is unique but the following 5 core principles are important for all healthcare teams to follow:

**Shared goals.** The team, including the patient (where appropriate) and carers, works to establish shared goals that reflect patient and carer priorities, that can be clearly articulated and supported by all team members.

**Clear roles.** There are clear expectations for each team member's functions, responsibilities, and accountabilities, which optimize the team's efficiency thereby accomplishing more than the sum of its parts.

**Mutual trust.** Team members earn each others' trust, creating strong norms of reciprocity and greater opportunities for shared achievement.

**Effective communication.** The team prioritizes and continuously refines its communication skills. It has consistent channels for candid and complete communication, which are accessed and used by all team members across all settings.

**Measurable processes and outcomes.** The team agrees on and implements timely feedback on successes and failures in relation to teamwork and achievement of goals. These are used to track and improve performance immediately and over time.