

ASK A PRACTICE ADVISOR

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What is Collaborative Practice?

Question: In my facility there is a lot of talk about working collaboratively. However, I am unsure what this means or how to do this. What does collaborative practice look like and what can I do to implement it within my practice area?

Collaborative practice is the ongoing process of partnering with others in the provision of health services including the identification of needs, data analysis, the development of alternatives, creation of, implementation and evaluation of preferred action plans. This requires the participation of various professionals in conjunction with the client to address client needs with a focus on providing the best care. It is the knowledge of multiple professions synergistically coming together to provide quality patient care.

Collaborative practice, however, is not the substitution of one care provider for another or the creation of one generic healthcare worker that fills multiple roles – collaborative practice clearly recognizes and values the role of each professional. It is the needs of the client that determines what care is required and who is the most appropriate professional to provide that particular aspect of care. However, we all contribute to particular facets of client care through the sharing of our profession-specific knowledge.

While many people understand the definition, putting the concepts into practice requires more information. The goals of collaborative practice are to improve

patient outcomes, improve patient satisfaction, and improve care provider satisfaction. The outcomes of collaborative practice include enhanced achievement of patient and family-centered goals and values, continuous communication, optimal staff utilization and job satisfaction, and respect amongst all health professionals.

In order to achieve the above goals and outcomes specific initiatives must be implemented. This includes development of clear roles and job descriptions for each profession. Subsequently, a clear understanding of one's own and others' roles and responsibilities is paramount for the implementation of collaborative practice. Additionally, recognition of when to consult other professionals is required. The final step is the development of clear lines of communication and respect for each professional's role (RNAO, 2006).

Development of a collaborative practice environment requires leadership at all levels. It is also imperative to the success of collaborative practice to establish open and transparent processes and communication, equality among all professionals for input, development of policies that support collaborative practice and, most importantly, **PUTTING THE CLIENT AT THE CENTER!**

References:

Registered Nurses Association of Ontario. (2006). Healthy work environments best practice guidelines: Collaborative practice among nursing teams. Ontario: Author. For a free copy of the guideline visit www.rnao.org