

Chapter 10: Multi-professional Teamworking

Inter-professional teamwork in Australia

Dr Maria Fedoruk, University of South Australia

Central to nursing practice is the ability of individual nurses to deliver, safe, competent nursing practice. Nurses also need to understand the roles and functions of other health professionals in healthcare teams. In the following scenario you are the nurse in an inter-professional healthcare team that include doctors, social workers, psychologists, and physiotherapists.

In this scenario a family of four (Mr and Mrs Jones and their children, Michael 17 years and Sylvie 14 years) is admitted to your unit following a serious motor vehicle accident in which the 17-year-old son was driving under a provisional licence. He was driving at a speed of 110kph (country speed limit in most Australian states and territories) when he lost control of the car and swerved, hitting a tree.

Paramedics attending the accident found that Mrs Jones was unconscious and unresponsive. An air ambulance was called for immediate transfer to a major metropolitan hospital. The other occupants were treated at the scene and then transferred to the local hospital for 24-hour observation.

The family were provided with regular updates on Mrs Jones's condition which was slowly improving. Upon their discharge from hospital the family went to see Mrs Jones in the neurosurgical unit. She had regained consciousness but had significant facial bruising and swelling, slurred speech and a left-sided weakness. The son, upon seeing his mother, broke down, crying and becoming hysterical so you, as the nurse on duty, took him out of the room.

Mr Jones and Sylvie were visibly upset but after talking with the neurosurgeon relaxed slightly. Mrs Jones was going to have a long recovery time especially in regaining her speech and movement in her left side. The interprofessional team assembled to care for Mrs Jones included:

- you (the nurse)
- the doctor
- the physiotherapist
- the speech therapist
- the occupational therapist
- the psychologist.

What you noticed as Mrs Jones was treated and rehabilitated that leadership within the inter-professional team was fluid in nature as the team member with the expertise and experience to best manage Mrs.Jones's needs at a given point in time adopted the leadership role.

At all times, during Mrs Jones's treatment communication amongst team members had to be of an excellent, targeted and addressing treatments and health outcomes for Mrs Jones. The psychologist provided support to the whole family especially to Michael who had trouble dealing with the aftermath of the accident.

Discuss the following questions with one or more peers of equivalent expertise to you:

- Which members of the inter-professional team would take the lead role in dealing with the Jones family?
- Which member of the inter-professional team would be best suited to take the lead in overseeing Mrs Jones's treatments and at what point in time?
- As the nurse, what is your role in this scenario? How do you provide leadership to the Jones family and to the team?
- Is effective communication necessary for the best functioning of the inter-professional team?
- Is effective communication necessary to ensure Mrs Jones optimal recovery?
- How would your team deal with disagreements among team members?