

Feature



Advancing Interprofessional Care and Learning: Seizing the opportunity as Medical Laboratory Technologists

Imagine a time when you felt valued and respected in your work as a medical lab technologist as part of a team with other professions, a time when: you understood the roles of other team members and they understood yours; communication was respectful and clear across professions; interprofessional conflicts were addressed professionally and recognized as not only normal but appreciated as opportunities for learning and growth through understanding others' perspectives; the team sought out feedback from and engaged patients/families in the team's work and it was recognized that the quality and safety of care provided was linked to the quality of relationships with others on the team. This is the vision for interprofessional care and education.

Interprofessional care occurs when multiple health workers from different professional backgrounds provide comprehensive health services by working with patients, their families, caregivers and communities to deliver the highest quality of care across settings (World Health Organization, 2010).

After almost 50 years of inquiry, there is now sufficient evidence to indicate that interprofessional education enables effective collaborative practice which in turn optimizes health-services, strengthens health systems and improves health outcomes. In both acute and primary care settings, patients report higher levels of satisfaction, better acceptance of care and improved health outcomes following treatment by a collaborative team. (2010, p. 18).

Further, the World Health Organization has cited the role of interprofessional care in decreasing: total client complications, length of hospital stay, tension and conflict in caregivers, staff turnover, hospital admissions, clinical error rates and mortality rates (World Health Organization, 2010).

A systematic review found support for the impact of interprofessional collaboration on positive outcomes while calling for further study as well (Zwarenstein, Goldman & Reeves, 2009). Teamwork is also often cited as an enabler of quality and safety and accreditation across professions and hospitals increasingly include reviews of team-based/interprofessional education and care.

Many healthcare professions have heeded this call for greater interprofessional collaboration and now include competency expectations for collaboration as regulated healthcare professionals. The Standards of Practice for Medical Laboratory Technologists within Ontario include collaboration, specifically, the MLT shall “*Collaborate and communicate effectively with patients, medical laboratory technologists and other health care providers to ensure the safe and effective delivery of service*”. And it can still be challenging to unpack what exactly is meant by these expectations for collaboration. What does it really mean? There are resources that may be helpful to reflect on one's own interprofessional collaborative competencies. Healthcare professionals are supported by the Canadian Interprofessional Health Collaborative (2010) to build competency in collaboration through articulation of six competency domains excerpted below from the National Interprofessional Competency Framework:

- *Learners/practitioners understand their own role and the roles of those in other professions, and use this knowledge appropriately to establish and achieve patient/client/family and community goals.*
- *Learners/practitioners understand the principles of team work dynamics and group/team processes to enable effective interprofessional collaboration.*
- *Learners/practitioners understand and can apply leadership principles that support a collaborative practice model.*
- *Learners/practitioners from different*

professions communicate with each other in a collaborative, responsive and responsible manner.

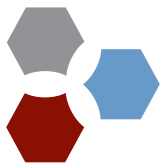
- *Learners/practitioners actively engage self and others, including the patient/client/family, in dealing effectively with interprofessional conflict.*
- *Learners/practitioners seek out, integrate and value, as a partner, the input and the engagement of the patient/client/family/community in designing and implementing care/services.*

For medical laboratory technologists, as with all professions, these competencies can provide a ‘jumping off’ point for reflection and their applicability may vary depending on your unique role. For example, the design of new processes that ‘bring the lab to the patients’ in the community will include collaborative engagement with patients and families and may demonstrate, “*Learners/practitioners seek out, integrate and value, as a partner, the input and the engagement of the patient/client/family/community in designing and implementing care/services*”.

Three background considerations are highlighted within this framework to inform the way the framework is applied, including: complexity, contextual issues and quality improvement. The Canadian Interprofessional Health Collaborative has a range of resources to support one to learn more about these competencies (for example, http://www.cihc.ca/files/CIHC_IPCompetencies_Feb1210.pdf).

In addition to articulating competencies for interprofessional collaboration, how might one build greater competence in collaboration? Interprofessional education (IPE) occurs when two or more professions learn about, from and with each other to enable effective collaboration and improve health outcomes (World Health Organization, 2010). The critical portions of this

Continued on page 6



Continued from page 5

definition are found within the words 'about, from and with' as IPE necessarily includes interactivity that affords opportunities to learn 'about, from and with' one another. Although the journey to interprofessional care is being fostered in many schools that educate healthcare providers of the future (e.g. <http://www.ipe.utoronto.ca/community-engagement/ipe-centres-networks>), interprofessional education is indeed about lifelong learning. There are many continuing interprofessional development opportunities available across the province and beyond including:

- Reflecting on your own interprofessional collaborative competencies and identifying actions to further your own development through informal and formal learning opportunities (e.g. www.ipe.utoronto.ca)
- Sharing with others the pride and understanding of your own role to support their interprofessional learning
- Identifying members who are on your team that you would like to learn more about and asking questions (questions adapted from Centre for IPE, University of Toronto) such as:
 - How did you decide to enter your profession and work in this context?
 - On this team, what does your work usually involve? Describe a typical day.
 - With whom do you collaborate most closely with on this team? Why? Can you provide a specific example/story to illustrate?
 - How do you work to establish and maintain relationships on this team?
- Reflecting on interprofessional care in your own team (questions adapted from Centre for IPE, University of Toronto) e.g.:
 - How would you describe how this team functions?
 - What would you highlight as strengths for how this team works together? What opportunities may enable this team to further build on their ability to collaborate?
 - What structures and processes enabled and hindered team collaboration? How might these be addressed?
- Identifying team education sessions (with

more than one profession learning together) and exploring how to integrate opportunities for more interprofessional learning, e.g. How can opportunities for interactive learning and learning **about, from, and with** one another be incorporated? How can key interprofessional teaching/learning moments be discussed/addressed?

- Participating in interprofessional teaching (contact your own local IPE lead within your hospital or school as applicable to explore further)
- The College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Ontario also has resources available online to promote interprofessional collaboration including case studies and e-tools (http://www.cmlto.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1263&Itemid=664)

In addition to interprofessional learning and teaching, identifying opportunities to influence and build interprofessional collaboration within your own context can also advance interprofessional collaboration including:

- Articulating interprofessional collaboration expectations within recruitment processes (e.g. job postings, interview processes)
- Integrating interprofessional education and care competence within professional development and performance reviews
- Identifying opportunities for interprofessional orientation (e.g. job shadowing across roles)
- Exploring approaches and tools to evaluate interprofessional education and collaboration

It is important to remember that we are part of the system we are trying to change and as such, our actions influence each other. Mother Teresa is credited with saying, "We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop." And it is helpful to be connected with others and engaged in this work as well! There are growing numbers of people interested in and excited about interprofessional education/care and ways to connect with others including:

- Reaching out within your own organization to learn more about who is working to promote interprofessional collaboration and education
- Engaging with others across the teams in which you work in continuing interprofessional development
- Participating in the open Centre for IPE, University of Toronto, Interprofessional Education and Care (IPEC) Community of Practice (Toronto based), and joining the newsletter distribution list – <http://ipe.utoronto.ca/community-engagement/centre-newsletters>
- Become a member of Canadian Interprofessional Health Collaborative <http://www.cihc.ca/>

Interprofessional education and care are ultimately about providing high quality experiences and outcomes for all. And it is about all of us, within this large and complex system, working collaboratively towards this aim. While there is still much to do, there are many successes to celebrate and opportunities for collaboration and support as we all work together and learn about, from, and with each other to improve collaboration and health outcomes (World Health Organization, 2010). ❖

References:

Reeves S, Perrier L, Goldman J, Freeth D, Zwarenstein M. Interprofessional education: effects on professional practice and healthcare outcomes (update). *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2013, Issue 3. Art. No.: CD002213. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD002213.pub3.

World Health Organization. (2010). *Framework for Action on Interprofessional Education & Collaborative Practice (WHO/HRH/HPN/10.3)*. Geneva: Department of Human Resources for Health. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/hrh/nursing_midwifery/en/

Zwarenstein M, Goldman J, Reeves S. Interprofessional collaboration: effects of practice-based interventions on professional practice and healthcare outcomes. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*. 2009;(3):CD000072.