



Feature

Interprofessional practice in rural or smaller sites



A case can be made that we laboratory personnel are not the best at promoting our profession. We know that the work we do is important and impacts the experiences and outcomes for patients everywhere. Not only do we collect and receive samples, we also perform routine and sophisticated testing, making sure our analyses meet multiple quality requirements so that our results and reports can support effective patient care. For many of us this is enough, and staying under the radar, and away from multidisciplinary committees and interprofessional teams, is desirable. For a growing number of us however, we need to find ways to extend our reach for purposes like this – ways that will work where *we* work.

Let's consider interprofessional practice. Does it look different in larger academic centers than it does in rural and smaller community hospitals? At its heart, interprofessional practice is all about healthcare teams working together, and towards a common goal of providing, safe, quality patient care.

The perceptions of healthcare professionals at larger sites may be that it is easier to form effective interprofessional care teams in a smaller rural environment because “everyone knows each other”, therefore it must be easier to be incorporated in different teams. As a leader and participant in rural healthcare teams for 40 years, I will argue that this perception is a *misconception*. The reality is that smaller sites face the same challenges as larger organizations when it comes to ensuring the laboratory is not left behind when institutional changes are implemented – connecting the *right* people, fostering a common understanding of roles and processes, and finding time and methods to make change happen with input from all the right people.

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healthcare groups working in silos was to be expected, even unavoidable. The advent of the Institute for Quality Management in Healthcare and Laboratory Accreditation: Qmentum Quality Program (Accreditation Canada) clearly demonstrate that in order to maintain safe, quality patient care, teams within a healthcare organization must work together. The requirement to meet accreditation standards has forced our hand and required us to look outside the walls of our own silo to get a better understanding of how healthcare is really delivered in our institutions. It has forced us to examine how our processes work, who is involved, and has ultimately provided some insight into each other's work.

Arguably, the pivotal difference between larger and smaller sites in healthcare delivery overall, and in IPC in particular, is that the pool of people from which to draw for committee and teamwork is much

smaller at rural sites. This brings to the forefront the issue of healthcare professionals' wearing multiple hats in order to meet institutional needs. To counter this, some sites have formed regional partnerships, joining forces and expertise with neighboring sites to form regional committees. This is knowledge sharing at work. It can accomplish necessary change in ways that make good sense, and this approach has been working well, for example, in regional hospital transfusion committees and infection control committees.

What things have I learned through the IPC work I do? Well, I know that working within teams forces us to be accountable. It grows our communication skills. It promotes understanding and also enhances our credibility. These are all good things for us and for our profession, and as we travel together toward the day where the healthcare experience will be a total experience and not a compartmentalized one, we should embrace this work. Personalized medicine is here, as is genomics, proteomics and patients wanting a more direct and seamless approach to their healthcare.

I can compare patient care delivered by interprofessional practice to enjoying the sounds of a symphony orchestra composed of many practiced and highly skilled virtuosos, all executing their craft, ever mindful that they play only a part in a much larger and richer performance! ♦

