

Enhancing Interdisciplinary Healthcare Telephone Communications



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BACKGROUND

Effective interprofessional (IP) communication is essential to high functioning healthcare teams, as communication failures are associated with medical errors and adverse outcomes.¹ Most programs designed to improve healthcare communication skills focus on healthcare providers and patients,² but few have been developed specifically for health professions students. Further, while there is a correlation between communications training and improved communication skills, it is unclear how these improved skills impact patient satisfaction, enhance compliance, or decrease mistakes.^{3,4}

Using simulation-based Team Strategies and Tools to Enhance Performance and Patient Safety (TeamSTEPPS™) improves student attitudes, knowledge and skills for interprofessional communication.⁶ While most TeamSTEPPS™ training is designed for application in face-to-face environments, an increasing amount of communication occurs via electronic means (including telephone). Hence, it is important to demonstrate the effectiveness of TeamSTEPPS™ tools under these circumstances.

Most interprofessional communication training occurs in person while a great deal of interprofessional communication in actual practice occurs through electronic means including the telephone. As a supplement to TeamSTEPPS™ training that occurred earlier in the curriculum, we developed simulated training activities to teach medicine and pharmacy students interprofessional telephone communication skills in the context of a 'typical' handoff conversation around patient care. This was followed by facilitated discussions during debriefing about how TeamSTEPPS™ tools and strategies improved team communication and could potentially improve outcomes and decrease the risk of medical errors.

METHODS

Participants:

- Indiana University School of Medicine (IUSM) 3rd year students
- Purdue College of Pharmacy (COP) 3rd or 4th professional year students

Facilitators:

- IUSM and Purdue COP faculty and staff
- One facilitator per small group

Session Plans:

- Pre-event: TED talk review – “Collective Confidence” by Dr. Lorelei Lingard
- Event:
 - In-person (IUSM students) and remote (Purdue COP students via Microsoft Zoom) participants
 - 5 scenarios developed – 1-2 medical students and 1 pharmacy student/scenario

SCENARIO EXAMPLES

Good Morning. I am Dr. (use your own name) and I am calling from my office. I just received a call from my patient, Anita Goodrich, who went to your pharmacy to get a prescription for Accutane filled. I wrote that prescription yesterday and do not know why your pharmacy has refused to fill this prescription. Ms. Goodrich mentioned something about special forms to my nurse, but I do not know what that means. I have never had problems like this before. I need you to fill this prescription now and call this young lady to apologize for your error.

Hello. My name is (use your own name) and I am a pharmacist at the CVS on the corner of Third and Washington streets. Your patient, John Greenstine, was in here today to fill a prescription for trimethoprim/sulfamethoxazole, 1 double strength tablet orally every 12 hours for 14 days. I have looked at Mr. Greenstine's record and note that he is already on warfarin at 3mg Monday and Friday and 6 mg the other 5 days of the week. I am concerned about a possible interaction between these two drugs. Trimethoprim/sulfamethoxazole may affect the warfarin concentration and result in an increased bleeding risk. What would you like me to do?

Hello, I am (use your real name), a medical student helping to take care of Roger Daltry. We have been trying to use clopidogrel for his recent heart attack, but the nurse said there was some issue with it, and couldn't get it sent down from the pharmacy. Would you be able to check into this, and see if there is anything in his profile that stands out? His PMH, medications, and allergies are:

PMH: COPD, Hypertension, and GERD Medications:

Medications: Albuterol 2 puffs Q4 H PRN, Tiotropium 1 inhalation daily, Omeprazole 20 mg daily, Lisinopril 40 mg PO daily, ASA 81 mg PO daily, Atorvastatin 80 mg PO daily

Allergies: Metformin – GI upset, ticagrelor – GI upset, diarrhea

Hello, I am (use your real name), the pharmacist at ABC Pharmacy located at the corner of Boiler and Maker streets. Your patient, Susanna Helms, is at the pharmacy insisting that I fill her hydrocodone/acetaminophen prescription you sent over a little while ago. I am concerned about this, because I just filled a prescription from you for this same thing yesterday. Susanna is standing at the counter and refusing to leave until she gets both prescriptions. What would you like me to do?

PRIMARY OUTCOME

- Assess students' understanding of how TeamSTEPPS™ communication tools can be used to improve telephonic communication.

INITIAL RESULTS

- Students rated sessions as valuable (“The in person sessions were helpful, and I enjoyed working with pharmacy students”)
- Specific Suggestions:
 - Reduce # of examples – spend more time on each
 - Simplify scenarios to make more developmentally appropriate to student knowledge level/experience

FUTURE PLANS

- Clarify goal(s) for each scenario
- Assess changes in students' online communication skills and perceived value
- Include additional healthcare disciplines
- Add family members or care givers into simulated conversations
- Develop scenarios that utilize other electronic communications such as text, IM, or email

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