

## THE TERMINOLOGY USED TO DESCRIBE TEAMWORK IN THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Teamwork in the healthcare system is a necessity because of the complexity of health problems and the emancipation of users. Teamwork characterized by working together, goal, purpose, ethics, problem-solving ideas, good communication, shared responsibility and synergy is a gold standard in the healthcare of patients where each member has specific task and function while respecting the others in the team.

The aims were to describe characteristics and benefits of teamwork in healthcare, to describe the types of teams in health care, and to identify the main limiting factors for a team's success in healthcare.

The effects of teamwork in healthcare are: reducing the length of stay in hospital, reducing costs of healthcare, increasing the satisfaction of users and care givers, improving the quality of health services, efficient use of resources in healthcare, improvement the quality of communication. Unlike the traditional disease focused approach, nowadays, the teams are focused on holistic approach to patient and health-disease phenomenon.

When performing complex tasks that involve quick decision-making, rapid interventions and quick solutions, especially in emergencies in healthcare and in treatment of chronic disease, teamwork is invaluable. The main limiting factors for the success of the team in healthcare are: lack of staff in healthcare, insufficiency in competency of staff, limited financial resources, inability of team members to work in team (lack of experience and education), lack of leadership in the healthcare institution for encourage and promote teamwork.

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### Introduction

In recent years, the emphasis has been placed on the importance of team and team work, as it achieves much better results than those achieved through individual work. A team is a group of people who have common goals that are solved by mutual cooperation. It is not easy to form and

maintain a team because team consists of members who have different professions and characters, but it is of great importance that adequate communication exists within the team as well as striving for a common goal (1, 2).

Teamwork in the healthcare system is a necessity because the health care giver as an individual is not in a possibility to meet all of health care user's demands. Numerous studies have proven that effective healthcare teams reduce the length of hospitalization and healthcare costs and increase custom and team member satisfaction.

The two most common terms used in the description of healthcare teams are the multidisciplinary and the interdisciplinary team (3).

A multidisciplinary team consists of individuals who have same or different medical professions who strive to achieve a common goal. Members of an interdisciplinary team have same or different profile and work continuously together, as opposed to a multidisciplinary team where individual members can be involved if needed. A common characteristic of both teams is the provision of the highest quality of patient care that is actually the highest possible quality of the provided health services.

Although teamwork is not a novelty in many sectors, including the healthcare system, there is still a need to explain the purpose of its existence as well as the need for further research.

### Defining a team as a term

A team is defined as a series of interpersonal interactions that lead to the achievement of a set goal, and teamwork represents the joint efforts of two or more members, as well as the individual achievements of each individual member, in order to solve tasks. The name "Team" is described as: T (together), E (everyone), A (achieve), M (more). A very important characteristic of a team is its success, which should be greater than the work of each member individually. Teams, according to their achievements, are divided into: unsuccessful, average and successful teams in their job. Classical teams use only a part of knowledge and expertise, while synergistic teams use the knowledge and abilities of all members, and they are known as super-summed teams (1, 4).

Before forming a team, it is very important to determine its purpose and tasks. It is important to know that any team has a life cycle that begins with the formation and construction of a team, and continuous with work which aim is to achieve greater team success. The team is made up of people of different beliefs, attitudes, characters, opinions, so it is generally difficult to maintain a balance in teamwork, especially in emergencies (2, 5).

When forming a team, it is very important to answer some questions, such as:

- Will the team be permanent or temporary?
- What is expected of the team?
- How will the team's success be measured?
- What pressures will the team be exposed to?

The team consists of a small number of people with specific skills who are committed to the common approach and realization of goals for which they are responsible. The biggest challenges in forming and operating a team are limited resources and rapid change. Organizing teams and teamwork involves fundamental changes in the way of work and manage (3).

### Defining teams in the healthcare system

The healthcare team is defined as a set of many different healthcare professions characterized by teamwork, purpose, ethics and shared responsibility and synergy, and each member is expected to be maximally engaged in accordance with his/her competencies. Due to complexity of the challenges in medicine, and in healthcare in general, teamwork is a necessary factor in organizing quality professional work (6, 7).

Teamwork is the gold standard in the care of patient where each member has a specific task while respecting the tasks and roles of the other members. Teamwork is of utmost importance for the quality of health services, the functioning of the health care system and the organization of health

care (9). Some of the benefits of teamwork in healthcare are:

- Reduction of costs
- Shorter length of hospitalization
- Efficient use of health resources
- Better communication
- Better quality of health services

Health care teams are in constant function to meet the needs and complex and multiple health problems of their users. A professional and coordinated team made up of healthcare professionals of different profiles enables healthcare delivery with high quality (8).

The model of teamwork in healthcare was created in 1920 in Great Britain. Unlike the traditional, disease-focused approach, today focus of team is a holistic approach to the patient and the health-disease phenomenon (9, 10). However, teamwork is still largely based on the traditional model that the patient is a passive recipient of health care services, and a team member is an active participant, while to a lesser but positive trend there is an approach to team work that respects the patient's active participation in the healing process (11).

In healthcare, teamwork has been represented since ancient times, as a multidisciplinary team, an interdisciplinary team, and a transdisciplinary team based on the interchange of roles of members within the team. The multidisciplinary team is based on different disciplines and the division of work task accordingly, and the interprofessional team is based on the mutual, collaborative cooperation of all members (12).

Today, healthcare teams are faced with comorbidities and chronic illnesses almost daily, so comprehensive health assessment and healthcare of such patients is required, which requires the collaboration of different professions (13).

### The aims

- To describe characteristics and benefits of teamwork in healthcare,
- To describe the types of teams in health care, and
- To identify the main limiting factors for a team's success in healthcare.

### Results and discussion

#### *Teamwork in the healthcare system*

The team represents a certain form of formal organization of joint work of a smaller or larger number of people, with common tasks and goals, plans, motives and interests. The achievement of one team member directly or indirectly affects everyone else and improves the final results of all work. The key differences between the team and the group are in the organization and some of the differences are shown in Table 1.

Teamwork has its advantages and disadvantages. Some of the benefits are: greater team

member motivation, better performance, more effective decision-making, a willingness to cooperate, enhancing each member's competences and work

experiences. Some of the disadvantages are: susceptibility to stress, chronic frustration, or tiredness with teamwork (4).

**Table 1.** Differences between the team and the group by specific characteristics

Group	Characteristic	Team
Individual	← <i>Responsibility</i> →	Individual and group
Low	← <i>Motivation</i> →	High
Individual	← <i>Aims</i> →	Common
Voting	← <i>Decision making</i> →	Consensus
Exist	← <i>Hierarchy</i> →	Minimal
Inconsistent	← <i>Skills</i> →	Consistent
Little or no	← <i>Autonomy</i> →	High degree
Irresistible	← <i>Organizational changes</i> →	Resistant

Each is basically a working group, and it grows into a team when its members are well organized and united to carry out their tasks. Teamwork is a form of coordinated activity based on the collaboration and competence of different experts, and its effectiveness is reflected in the evaluation of all that has been achieved, as well as the satisfaction of team members (5). According to WHO, teamwork involves the action of more professionals towards a common goal. The ideal number of members is 3-12 people (6).

Teamwork in healthcare enables coping with complex, risky situations and problems, reducing the use of time, money and other resources, while increasing efficiency. Teamwork is a means by which average people achieve above-average results (7), and a new, modern and flexible way of working for people who need to solve a particular complex problem based on their own judgment, or to suggest the most appropriate way to solve certain issues and problems. Individuals, namely members must constantly be affirmed and motivated in order to maintain mutual trust (3). However, the main limiting factors for team success in health care are: lack of staff, insufficiently competent staff, limited financial resources, inability of team members to work in a team (lack of experience and education), lack of leadership in a healthcare facility to encourage teamwork.

#### *Effectiveness of teamwork in the healthcare system*

In addition to professional knowledge, it is important that the team members have the ability to listen to each other and to appreciate others' opinions, namely, the team must have good communication skills such as conflict resolution, counseling, assertiveness, etc. It is proven that a well-functioning team reports only a few professional mistakes and stress. A multidisciplinary team, such

as health care teams, most often must possess the aforementioned abilities and skills, because they consist of members of different professions, in order to maximize results and increase patient satisfaction with the services provided (6). Communication in medicine and in healthcare in general is the basis for successful collaboration between patients and their families and between healthcare professionals. According to modern understanding, the four most important components of good clinical practice are, in addition to knowledge and physical examination, communication skills and problem-solving abilities. Any healthcare provider, regardless of position and specialty, is an indispensable part of a whole that can only be maximized through joint collaboration, and numerous studies have shown that collegiality between team members contributes to a positive treatment outcome (8).

Effective healthcare teams are more flexible, take more risks, have new ideas, and make decisions faster. According to Belbin, it is necessary that different, well-coordinated and compatible members exist in order to make team which is successful, because if all team members have similar behavioral styles or similar roles, the team becomes imbalanced. For the proper functioning of the team, it is very important that communication is regular, open and honest and that information is accessible to all team members (7).

#### *Dilemmas of naming the teams in the healthcare system*

The four most common terms used to describe health care teams are: multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, multiprofessional and interprofessional (14). The prefix "multi" implies the diversity of the employees that make up the team, while "inter" denotes joint and mutual tasks, and interprofessional and interdisciplinary teams are teams with formal structure (15). According to the way they func-

tion, health teams are interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary teams (7). Although these terms are most represented in the literature, they are not always clearly defined. Multidisciplinary healthcare teams are the most represented, especially when it comes to chronic diseases, and interprofessional teams differ from multidisciplinary teams in that the main team member is the patient.

The development of healthcare teams was initially non-interdisciplinary, i.e., the team consisted of, for example, nurses working in the same department (16). Although there are different names for describing healthcare teams, none of them should affect communication within the team or quality of team work (17).

The term "interprofessional" refers to the education of health professionals from different disciplines, and the term "multidisciplinary team" most commonly describes healthcare teams composed of different disciplines (10). In describing teams on the basis of their structure or cooperation, some authors use the name multiprofessional, but use the name interdisciplinary when referring to the interventions performed by the team, while the term interprofessional means both. In describing healthcare teams, there is no one universal name which can cause some problems or ambiguities. Haggerty et al. in 2007, in his study defined a multidisciplinary team as a joint collaboration of professionals from different medical disciplines while providing healthcare (18).

In some studies, the term "interprofessional team" is defined as work between two or more clinical professions, while the term "interdisciplinary team" refers to the work of physicians of different specialties, all with the aim of improving mutual cooperation and the quality of services provided (19).

Numerous studies consider that the healthcare teams consist not only of health professionals of different profiles, but also non-medical staff such as administrative staff and others, while Mills et al. in 2010, in their study included staff in management position in healthcare facilities from other cities or countries as members of the healthcare teams (20).

#### *A multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary team*

The multidisciplinary team is made up of members of different medical profiles who, through their work and effort, contribute to the improvement and promotion of health, while the interdisciplinary team consists of health professionals who, through mutual cooperation, decide on the well-being of patients. Teamwork has positive effects because it contributes to improved results, efficiency and safety (21).

The term "team" is universally used in all working groups of health and social care. Despite the development of teams, interdisciplinary teamwork is not clear enough for practitioners. In order to achieve efficiency and reliability in an interdisciplinary team, it is essential that all members have specific knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to monitor each other's performances and maintain a positive climate and collaboration within the team (22).

An interdisciplinary team consists of members of a particular specialty, support staff, and administrative staff who work together toward a common goal. The Australian study promoted interdisciplinary collaboration as a priority in health care delivery with mandatory feedback. Evaluation of teamwork can improve team cohesiveness, team focus, as well as professional identity (20). Clinical knowledge and skills of interdisciplinary healthcare teams have been improved in recent years. There is also a need for increasing research on interdisciplinary teams, specifically their achievements. According to some studies, the interdisciplinary team is also called the participatory team (23, 24).

A holistic approach to the patient and the principle of working together towards the set goal is a characteristic of interdisciplinary teamwork. According to some authors, the interdisciplinary teamwork is considered to be highly effective, which contributes to socioeconomic advantage in the healthcare system. According to the literature, members from interdisciplinary teams show higher levels of job satisfaction (9).

#### *Interprofessional and multiprofessional team*

Interprofessional teams are characterized by teamwork and knowledge sharing due to the diversity of the professions that make them, but the multiprofessional team is determined by the structure of the team (10). Although there are numerous dilemmas when describing healthcare teams, they are still a key base of clinical practice. According to some definitions, interprofessional work involves interaction within team members, while the work of multiprofessional and multidisciplinary teams is based on the presence of different professions, but does not imply mandatory mutual communication of all members, which is one of the main problems for effective team work. Interprofessional work involves the mutual learning of collaboration and dialogue. However, there is insufficient data about terminology used to describe healthcare teams.

In their studies, some authors refer to healthcare teams as multifunctional teams, meaning all of the above terms. The team members are individuals with different skills, experiences and traits, and because of that conflict can easily occur, so the operation of such team in practice is a challenge. Especially such are the interprofessional teams. The work of the interprofessional team is based on interprofessional education, which involves the mutual exchange of knowledge and experience between different professions in order to achieve high quality health care. An interprofessional team is defined as an association of multiple health professions, working together to achieve greater quality in problem solving (21). Failure to follow the principles of teamwork can be the cause of many problems. Some members of the team may be in the shadow of other members, and according to some studies, it has been noted that nurses have been most often denied to make some suggestions and opinions even though they are an equal and obligatory member of the health team (22). Unlike the interprofessional and multiprofessional approach, the multidisciplinary

approach to patient care has proven to be the most appropriate when it comes to chronic diseases (23, 24).

Multiprofessional teams consist of members with different or the same professions that work together to take care of the patient's condition and meet his or her needs. The multiprofessional team can be changed in order to meet the demands of patients. The approach of the multiprofessional team has shown high-level results in palliative care (25).

According to some studies, there are also teams that collaborate remotely, using modern technologies whose progress is also being noticed in the healthcare system. These are the so-called virtual teams and they are working in various branches of telemedicine, especially when it comes to data sharing. A virtual team is a group of individuals who share common goals, and who operate using communication technologies regardless of time and space (26).

#### *Ambiguities in the terminology of healthcare teams*

Standardized definitions of healthcare teams are not reliable when it comes to understanding and using different terms on a daily basis. The consistency of applying a standardized term in clinical practice, policy, education can enhance understanding, collaboration and communication between sectors (10). According to the latest research, the most important factors of any healthcare team is the communication and holding meetings with the aim of solving the current problem, as well as adequate education of its members (27).

When describing teams in healthcare, different terms are used that relate to the place, job description, etc. The most represented descriptors are interdisciplinary and interprofessional, as well as multidisciplinary and multiprofessional teams, however, due to the inconsistency of using only one

fixed term and numerous ambiguities, further research on this topic is needed (10).

Some authors find that difficulties in defining and understanding the context of teams are due to the use of different terms. For these reasons, there is a need to adopt a general term to describe healthcare teams that will maintain consistency in education and clinical practice. A characteristic of a professional team is education of its members, but, according to some studies, there is a small number of theoretical education programs and practical training in teamwork (9).

#### **Conclusion**

When performing complex tasks involving quick decision-making, rapid intervention, and rapid finding of solutions, especially in emergencies and treatment of chronic diseases, teamwork is invaluable.

Different terms are used in describing healthcare teams, and the most represented are: multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary team. Also, it is necessary to reduce the need to describe certain types of health teams by job titles or job descriptions, but it is desirable to define a standardized name that will be understandable to the general population, because the essence of teamwork is important.

There are certain ambiguities regarding the use of these terms, but the essence of all teams is cooperation, honesty, good communication, motivation and realization of goals that have been set.

What healthcare professionals lack are experience in working in a team and teamwork training. The main limiting factors for the success of the team in health care are: lack of staff, insufficiently competent staff, limited financial resources, inability of team members to work with the team (lack of experience and education), lack of leadership in the healthcare institutions to encourage and promote team work.

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## TERMINOLOGIJA KOJA SE KORISTI ZA OPISIVANJE TIMSKOG RADA U ZDRAVSTVENOM SISTEMU

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Timski rad u zdravstvenom sistemu predstavlja neophodnost zbog kompleksnosti zdravstvenih problema i emancipacije korisnika. Timski rad je zlatni standard u zbrinjavanju bolesnika, gde svaki član ima svoju određenu ulogu, uz uvažavanje uloga drugih članova i koji karakterišu zajednički rad i cilj, zajedničke svrha, etika i razmena ideja usmerena ka rešavanju problema, dobra komunikacija, zajednička odgovornost i sinergija.

Ciljevi rada bili su opisati karakteristike i prednosti timskog rada u zdravstvenoj zaštiti, opisati vrste timova u zdravstvenoj zaštiti i prepoznati osnovne limitirajuće faktore za uspeh tima u zdravstvenoj zaštiti. Odabrana metoda rada bila je pregled literature.

Efekti timskog rada u zdravstvu su: smanjenje dužine hospitalizacije, smanjenje troškova i povećanje zadovoljstva korisnika i članova tima, unapređenje kvaliteta zdravstvenih usluga, efikasno korišćenje zdravstvenih resursa i bolja komunikacija. Za razliku od tradicionalnog pristupa, koji je bio usmeren isključivo na bolest, danas se timovi fokusiraju na holistički pristup bolesniku i fenomenu zdravlje–bolest.

Pri obavljanju složenih zadataka, koji podrazumevaju brzo donošenje odluka, brzu intervenciju i brzo pronalaženje rešenja, pogotovo u hitnim situacijama i tretmanu hroničnih bolesti, timski rad je od neprocenjivog značaja. Osnovni limitirajući faktori za uspeh tima u zdravstvenoj zaštiti su: nedostatak kadra, nedovoljno kompetentan kadar, ograničeni finansijski resursi, nekompetentnost članova tima za rad u timu (nedostatak iskustva i edukacije), nedostatak vođstva u zdravstvenoj ustanovi, nedostatak ohrabriranja i promocije timskog rada.

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**Ključne reči:** *zdravstvena nega, zdravstveni tim, timski rad, zdravstveni sistem*