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**Group 1 of theme sessions
Interprofessional learning
and working**

Core paper and theme paper abstracts

Tuesday 2 September 2014



Boundary crossing within healthcare

Deb Rowe, Senior Lecturer, University of Auckland; Sue Gasquoine, Senior Lecturer, Unitec Institute of Technology; Mark Barrow, Associate Dean (Academic), University of Auckland, New Zealand; Judy McKimm, Dean of Medical Education, Swansea University, UK

Introduction

The concept of 'teams' has become a popular form for structuring and analysing the organisation and management of work. The healthcare environment has not been immune to this conceptualisation particularly around the notion of enabling functional interprofessional teams working collaboratively (WHO, 2010). However, 'common sense' understandings of teams and teamworking may not reflect the reality of interprofessional working expected and encountered in the healthcare system.

Methods

We have used the concept of 'boundary crossing' in Engestrom's Activity Theory to further enhance understanding of interprofessional teamworking from the data gathered in our study of senior doctors and nurses working in two different clinical settings in a large metropolitan hospital in New Zealand. This longitudinal study builds on an earlier phase where we interviewed and carried out a questionnaire survey of newly graduated doctors and nurses working in secondary care, exploring their perceptions and understandings of leadership and teamworking. In stage two, 40 face-to-face, individual, semi-structured interviews were carried out with senior doctors and nurses working in two clinical settings in a large metropolitan hospital.

Results

The senior clinicians in our study articulated a clear interprofessional and collaborative focus when asked to describe the nature of their work. The descriptions of these interprofessional working activities typified the concept of 'boundary crossing' including their description of how each team member brings certain attributes to the situation and uses them to contribute to the delivery of effective healthcare.

Discussion

In addition to describing how the concept of boundary crossing helps explain the complexities of interprofessional practice, this presentation will use an activity theory lens to give further consideration to our data and describe the provision of care by these nurses and doctors. Activity theory provides a framework within which it is possible to examine complex relationships between subject and object and the historical and social context in which these relationships take place. It is increasingly clear that the provision of care requires moving beyond the work of independent uniprofessional teams into the world of interprofessional knots that encourage interaction and collaboration beyond professional boundaries and enables active boundary crossing. Professional practice is portrayed as if it is a cultural, a given – robust and static and in the case of medicine organised around an autonomous specialist practitioner while nursing's hierarchy is based on a collectivist approach to practice. In reality professional practice is dynamic, changing and influenced by the actors working within complex organisational settings. We explore the extent to which the work of senior clinicians embraces boundary crossing while respecting professional boundaries.

References

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- Engestrom, Y. (2008) *From Teams to Knots: Activity-theoretical studies of collaboration and learning at work*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
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Key words:

- team work
- boundary crossing
- interprofessional learning
- professional practice
- activity theory.

How this contributes to knowledge development within this theme:

- teaching and learning
- professional boundaries vs boundary crossing
- analysing views of practice.