Best healthcare practice depends on knowing not just your own skills and strengths, but also those of your colleagues, and then using those assets effectively

SPIRIT OF COLLABORATION

Team working has always been a core skill for healthcare professionals, and with collaborative working very much part of NHS chief executive Simon Stevens’ Five Year Forward View, it has become even more integral to the job.

For Hays Healthcare director Simon Hudson working on improving your team player skills is key to the goal of providing an excellent service.

‘Take time to work out what your colleagues are great at and collaborate with them to learn this skill as well,’ he advises. ‘This will help the team get the best out of each member and you will be able to learn from each other.’

Awareness of colleagues’ skills is also encouraged by Michelle Brown, discipline lead for healthcare practice at the University of Derby’s Chesterfield campus. ‘Being aware of your own strengths and those of others can help you support the rest of the team,’ she says. ‘By drawing on their strengths and not isolating individuals, you can help can foster an inclusive approach where every member feels valued.’

A good nursing leader should have the skills of others uppermost in mind, agrees Nick Simpson, chief executive of healthcare recruitment specialist MSI Group.

‘In allocating broad responsibilities at the beginning of each shift, bear in mind the particular strengths and experiences of each nurse and healthcare assistant,’ he says. ‘Some nursing staff may have a particular rapport with a patient and their family, for example, which should be taken into account.’

Everyone needs to be aware that they are working towards shared objectives and be ready to offer others any assistance they can, he adds. ‘Similarly, if you need an extra pair of hands for a difficult dressing change, don’t be afraid to speak up. Agency nurses in particular should make a conscious effort to ask questions and voice their opinions to ensure their varied experiences are a valuable asset to the team.’

Communication is central to a collaborative approach. University of Sunderland principal lecturer in health John Fulton says it is essential that everyone shares their concerns and perspectives about patients. ‘Only by doing this can they get a truly holistic perspective of the individual patient.’

Failing to work collaboratively can have an adverse effect on patient safety, with potentially disastrous consequences. ‘We have all heard horror stories of NHS never events,’ says Mr Simpson. ‘But the chances of making such mistakes are reduced by everyone following procedures and communicating effectively.

‘It is worth remembering that teamwork should stretch far beyond the nursing team to include every other professional working towards the same objectives – from porters to anaesthetists.’

By Dean Gurden, a freelance journalist

Tips for being a team player

- Know your strengths.
- Know and use the strengths of your team.
- Communicate effectively.
- Adopt a compassionate approach.
- Work with the team to improve services.
- Listen to your team and all those around you.
- Respect your team and the contribution they make to the service you are working to provide.

Source: Michelle Brown, discipline lead for healthcare practice at the University of Derby’s Chesterfield campus

A good team has an inclusive approach where every member feels valued