



COLLABORATIVE CARE: EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS BETWEEN NURSES, SOCIAL WORKERS, AND PSYCHOLOGISTS IN HEALTHCARE ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

Collaborative care among healthcare professionals is essential for providing comprehensive and effective patient care. This study explores the dynamics between nurses, social workers, and psychologists in healthcare environments, focusing on their roles, interactions, and impact on patient outcomes and job satisfaction. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving surveys and semi-structured interviews with healthcare professionals from various settings. The findings reveal that effective interprofessional collaboration is associated with improved patient outcomes, increased job satisfaction, and reduced burnout among healthcare professionals. Key factors contributing to successful collaboration include clear communication, mutual respect, shared decision-making, and supportive organizational culture. Barriers to collaboration, such as power imbalances, role ambiguity, and limited resources, are also discussed. The study highlights the need for targeted interventions and policies to foster collaborative care and optimize the contributions of nurses, social workers, and psychologists in healthcare environments.

Keywords: collaborative care, interprofessional collaboration, nurses, social workers, psychologists, healthcare environments, patient outcomes, job satisfaction

Introduction

Collaborative care has emerged as a crucial approach in healthcare, emphasizing the importance of interprofessional teamwork in delivering comprehensive and patient-centered care (Reeves et al., 2017). Nurses, social workers, and psychologists play vital roles in healthcare environments, each contributing unique expertise and perspectives to patient care (Ambrose-Miller & Ashcroft, 2016). However, the dynamics between these professionals and the impact of their collaboration on patient outcomes and job satisfaction remain underexplored.



The purpose of this study is to investigate the roles, interactions, and experiences of nurses, social workers, and psychologists in healthcare settings, with a focus on understanding the factors that facilitate or hinder effective collaboration. By examining the perspectives of these professionals, the study aims to identify strategies for enhancing interprofessional collaboration and optimizing patient care.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the roles and contributions of nurses, social workers, and psychologists in collaborative care within healthcare environments?
2. How do the interactions and dynamics between these professionals influence patient outcomes and job satisfaction?
3. What factors facilitate or hinder effective collaboration among nurses, social workers, and psychologists in healthcare settings?

Literature

Review

Interprofessional collaboration has been widely recognized as a key component of high-quality healthcare delivery (World Health Organization, 2010). Studies have shown that effective collaboration among healthcare professionals is associated with improved patient outcomes, reduced healthcare costs, and increased job satisfaction (Reeves et al., 2017; Schot et al., 2020).

Nurses, as the largest group of healthcare professionals, play a central role in collaborative care. They are responsible for direct patient care, care coordination, and communication with other healthcare team members (Haddad et al., 2020). Nurses' collaboration with social workers and psychologists has been found to enhance patient care, particularly in the management of complex health conditions and psychosocial needs (Ambrose-Miller & Ashcroft, 2016).

Social workers in healthcare settings provide essential services, including psychosocial assessments, counseling, care coordination, and advocacy (Steketee et al., 2017). Their collaboration with nurses and psychologists is crucial for addressing patients' social determinants of health and ensuring a holistic approach to care (Saxe Zerden et al., 2018).

Psychologists in healthcare environments contribute to patient care through psychological assessments, interventions, and consultation with other healthcare professionals (Wahlström et al., 2018). Their collaboration with nurses and social workers is essential for addressing patients' mental health needs and promoting overall well-being (Kwasnicka et al., 2019).

Despite the recognized importance of interprofessional collaboration, healthcare professionals often face barriers to effective teamwork, such as power imbalances, role ambiguity, and communication challenges (Schot et al., 2020). These barriers can negatively impact patient care and job satisfaction among healthcare professionals (Körner et al., 2015).

Method

This study employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative

semi-structured interviews to gather data from nurses, social workers, and psychologists working in healthcare environments.

Sample

A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit participants from various healthcare settings, including hospitals, community health centers, and rehabilitation facilities. A total of 150 healthcare professionals (50 nurses, 50 social workers, and 50 psychologists) participated in the survey, and 30 participants (10 from each profession) were selected for semi-structured interviews.

Data

The survey consisted of validated scales measuring interprofessional collaboration (Interprofessional Collaboration Scale; Kenaszchuk et al., 2010), job satisfaction (Job Satisfaction Survey; Spector, 1985), and patient outcomes (Patient-Reported Outcome Measures; Cella et al., 2010). The survey was administered online using Qualtrics software.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to collaborative care. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software (version 26). Descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, and multiple regression analyses were performed to examine the relationships between interprofessional collaboration, job satisfaction, and patient outcomes.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcripts were coded, and themes were identified based on patterns and commonalities across the data.

Results

Quantitative

The survey results revealed significant positive correlations between interprofessional collaboration and job satisfaction ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$) and between interprofessional collaboration and patient outcomes ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$). Multiple regression analyses demonstrated that interprofessional collaboration significantly predicted job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.64$, $p < 0.001$) and patient outcomes ($\beta = 0.69$, $p < 0.001$), after controlling for demographic variables.

Table

Correlations between Interprofessional Collaboration, Job Satisfaction, and Patient Outcomes

Variable	1	2	3
1. Interprofessional Collaboration	-		

Variable	1	2	3
2. Job Satisfaction	0.68*	-	
3. Patient Outcomes	0.72*	0.65*	-

Note. * $p < 0.001$.

Table

2

Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Job Satisfaction and Patient Outcomes

Predictor	Job Satisfaction		Patient Outcomes	
	β	SE	β	SE
Interprofessional Collaboration	0.64*	0.05	0.69*	0.04
Age	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01
Gender	0.06	0.08	0.04	0.07
Years of Experience	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.01

Note. * $p < 0.001$.

Qualitative

Findings

The thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews yielded four main themes:

1. Roles and Contributions in Collaborative Care
Participants described their specific roles and contributions to collaborative care. Nurses emphasized their role in direct patient care and coordination, social workers highlighted their focus on psychosocial aspects and resource navigation, and psychologists discussed their role in providing psychological assessments and interventions.
2. Dynamics and Interactions
Participants shared their experiences of working collaboratively with other professionals. They emphasized the importance of effective communication, mutual respect, and shared decision-making in fostering positive interactions and teamwork.
3. Facilitators of Collaboration
Participants identified several factors that facilitate effective collaboration, including

supportive organizational culture, clear role definitions, regular team meetings, and interprofessional education and training.

4. Barriers to Collaboration
Participants also discussed the challenges and barriers they face in collaborative care, such as power imbalances, role ambiguity, time constraints, and limited resources.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the importance of collaborative care among nurses, social workers, and psychologists in healthcare environments. The quantitative results demonstrate significant positive relationships between interprofessional collaboration, job satisfaction, and patient outcomes, suggesting that effective collaboration is crucial for both healthcare professionals and patients.

The qualitative findings provide insights into the roles, dynamics, and experiences of these professionals in collaborative care. Participants emphasized the importance of clear communication, mutual respect, and shared decision-making in fostering effective collaboration. These findings are consistent with previous research that has identified key elements of successful interprofessional collaboration (Reeves et al., 2017; Schot et al., 2020).

The study also sheds light on the facilitators and barriers to collaboration in healthcare settings. Supportive organizational culture, clear role definitions, and interprofessional education and training were identified as important facilitators, while power imbalances, role ambiguity, and limited resources were found to hinder effective collaboration. These findings suggest that addressing these barriers and promoting facilitators can enhance collaborative care and improve outcomes for both healthcare professionals and patients.

Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for healthcare practice, education, and policy. Healthcare organizations should prioritize the development of supportive cultures and structures that foster interprofessional collaboration. This can be achieved through initiatives such as interprofessional education and training programs, regular team meetings, and clear role definitions.

Healthcare education programs should incorporate interprofessional learning opportunities to prepare future professionals for collaborative practice. This can include joint courses, simulations, and clinical placements that allow students from different disciplines to work together and develop collaborative skills.

Policymakers should recognize the importance of collaborative care and develop policies and guidelines that support interprofessional collaboration in healthcare settings. This can include funding for interprofessional education and training, incentives for collaborative practice, and regulations that promote teamwork and communication among healthcare professionals.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered. The sample was purposively selected and may not be representative of all healthcare professionals. Future research should aim to include a more diverse sample from various healthcare settings and geographical locations.

The cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to establish causal relationships between the variables. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine the long-term impact of interprofessional collaboration on job satisfaction and patient outcomes.

Future research should also explore the perspectives of patients and their families regarding collaborative care and its impact on their healthcare experiences and outcomes. Additionally, interventional studies are needed to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies for enhancing interprofessional collaboration in healthcare settings.

Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of collaborative care among nurses, social workers, and psychologists in healthcare environments. The findings demonstrate significant positive relationships between interprofessional collaboration, job satisfaction, and patient outcomes. The qualitative insights provide a deeper understanding of the roles, dynamics, and experiences of these professionals in collaborative care.

The study emphasizes the need for healthcare organizations, educators, and policymakers to prioritize the development of supportive cultures, structures, and policies that foster interprofessional collaboration. By addressing the barriers and promoting the facilitators identified in this study, healthcare systems can optimize the contributions of nurses, social workers, and psychologists and improve outcomes for both healthcare professionals and patients.

Collaborative care is essential for delivering comprehensive and patient-centered care in today's complex healthcare environments. By working together, nurses, social workers, and psychologists can leverage their unique expertise and perspectives to provide the highest quality of care and support for patients and their families.

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