Interprofessional collaboration among junior doctors and nurses in the hospital setting

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Undergraduate medical and nursing education should prepare graduates to work collaboratively in their first years of hospital practice. Evidence suggests interprofessional collaboration (IPC) in healthcare can be suboptimal. Educational interventions to develop the prerequisites for effective IPC must be informed by the types of collaborative activities required, and potential sources of tension. There is limited information on IPC specific to junior doctors and nurses in the hospital context.

Our aim was to understand the nature of the interactions, activities and issues affecting these new graduates, in order to inform interventions to improve IPC in this context.

We interviewed 25 junior doctors and nurses, transcribed recorded interview data into nVivo qualitative software package, and coded data against an established framework for teamwork.

While interviewees expressed mutual respect, organisational structures often limited the extent to which they could build trust and establish effective professional relationships. They acknowledged sharing information and agreed goals were necessary for good decision-making, but the working environment and their differing perspectives created impediments which affected optimal patient care. An open environment for communication was acknowledged as important for patient safety but there were some barriers. Our data suggest that junior doctors and nurses see themselves as having complementary and non-competitive roles in patient care, but the leadership needed to establish an interprofessional team was not always apparent.

Our data highlight the professionalism, respect and adaptability of these junior health professionals. We document the types of collaborative activities and tensions relevant in this context, and offer potential solutions.