TeamSTEPPS at UNC Medical Center
Creating High-Performing Teams to Achieve Quality and Safety Goals

Our Teamwork Culture

“We know that teamwork is at the core of what we do and enables us to be successful.”
Dr. Brian Goldstein, Exec. VP and COO

Team training is widely recognized as an important factor in improving the quality of medical care. At UNC, we use an evidence-based approach to teaching teamwork developed by the Department of Defense Patient Safety Program and Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. TeamSTEPPS (Team Strategies and Tools to Enhance Performance and Patient Safety) provides tools and strategies to improve communication, leadership, and patient care.

Participants in TeamSTEPPS training programs at UNC have reported increased perceptions of safety in their units and improved communication both within and across patient care teams.

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<th>2015 UNC Medical Center Patient Safety Culture Survey Results</th>
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<td>86% Positive Perception of Teamwork within Units</td>
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<td>62% Positive Perception of Teamwork across Units</td>
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<td>Teaching Hospital benchmark: 79%</td>
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<td>Teaching Hospital benchmark: 57%</td>
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Evidence Based Tools and Strategies

While there are numerous studies showing the benefit of specific applications of TeamSTEPPS tools and strategies to solve quality and safety challenges, a recent meta-analysis sought to test training theories and synthesize our understanding of team training in the healthcare environment.


• “Healthcare team training is effective”

• Training effects: outcomes; reduced medical errors, shortened length of stay, decreased patient mortality, improved patient satisfaction and safety climate

• Training is effective under a variety of conditions; regardless of the training strategy, team composition (interprofessional/interdisciplinary), participant type (student/clinicians), and patient acuity of the trainee's unit

Trending Topics in Teamwork

After many years of work, Google’s re:Work researchers seeking to create more effective teams finally realized that who is on the team matters less than how the team works together. The most important factor was “psychological safety,” or the ability of team members to ask questions, offer new ideas, or make mistakes without fear of embarrassment or punishment from other members.

According to members of the New England Journal of Medicine’s Catalyst Insights Council, the top three leadership skills necessary to lead healthcare, innovation, and transformation are based on the need to effectively create and lead team-based care.

A Commitment to Teamwork

In September 2007, UNC Health Care was awarded a two-year contract with the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) to implement and measure the effectiveness of TeamSTEPPS. The pilot implementation began with the PICU, SICU, and Respiratory Therapy and has spread to many other areas since that time.

In FY16, the Medical Center Improvement Council supported the expansion of TeamSTEPPS training into “high-risk” areas, as well as the newly-opened Hillsborough hospital and “early adopter” units with a particular interest in teamwork. These areas are currently applying their new knowledge and tools to improve quality, safety, and efficiency of patient care in their areas. With the selection of TeamSTEPPS training as an organizational quality goal for FY17, many new areas are preparing to offer training to their staff.

Aligning Teamwork with Quality and Safety Goals

Many of our successful quality and safety efforts at UNC find common ground when it comes to teamwork and communication. Empowering individuals to speak up when they have a concern about a patient or situation, enabling quick activation of specialized team responses for emergency situations, and enhancing communication processes during care transitions all improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and safety of care for our patients.

The UNC TeamSTEPPS Program is now a part of the School of Medicine’s Institute for Healthcare Quality Improvement (IHQI), which is led by Dr. Tina Schade Willis. TeamSTEPPS training and tools will be aligned and integrated with other concurrent organizational quality and safety efforts to improve compliance with sepsis bundles and reduce various types of patient harm and hospital-acquired infections.

“How Individuals Can Improve Teamwork

• Attend TeamSTEPPS training when it is offered in your area
• Ask your team to conduct a brief before an event or debrief after an event
• Show gratitude and appreciation to your team when they demonstrate good teamwork
• Ask team members to “close the loop” to ensure that key information has been received and understood
• Request a team huddle if you are unsure of the plan or need clarification
• Ensure that all team members have the opportunity to speak up and voice any questions or concerns about the plan of care
• Use callouts in team events to keep the team informed and organized
• Always speak up respectfully and be an advocate for the safety of your patients
• Visit our TeamSTEPPS website for more information and resources at https://www.med.unc.edu/IHQI/training/teamstepps

Hillsborough OR team debriefing a mock emergency transfer

Dr. Tina Schade Willis
Director, IHQI